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HAZEL COMBE;

OR,

THE GOLDEN RULE.



HAZEL COMBE;

OR,

THE GOLDEN RULE.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "RECOMMENDED TO MERCY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1863,

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250. p. 97.

LONDON:
HARRIS AND STONE, PRINTERS, WHITECHURCH.



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HAZEL COMBE;

OR,

THE GOLDEN RULE.

CHAPTER I.

RUN TO EARTH.

WHEN Sir Matthew Fendall of Hazel Combe was only twelve months old, he had the misfortune to inherit the titles and estates of his ancestors. His father, the preceding Sir Matthew, who died in the year 1780, had been a gentleman of a jovial disposition, and of sporting tastes and habits; tastes which the lady who bore his name was happy enough to share. In these days, Lady Fendall would probably have been designated as a strong-minded woman, for she was authoritative in manner, utterly destitute of those modern calamities called nerves, and withal was a mighty huntress before the eyes of the county in which she lived: not a little proud, indeed, were the sporting individuals in that

county, of the performances in the field of the popular Lady Fendall, the wife of their estimable master of the hounds, whose hospitality was so unimpeachable, and whose good-nature was above all praise.

The house in which this well-assorted couple lived and flourished was a large and commodious mansion, dating from the days of Queen Elizabeth, and pleasantly situated in one of the southern counties of England. A fair estate surrounded the old dwelling-place; not a very extensive or overgrown one, for the Sir Matthews of centuries past had not busied themselves in laying field to field, and in destroying the landmarks of their neighbours; but, though not far spreading, Hazel Combe was still a goodly estate enough, and one which had ensured to the baronets of the old creation an important position, as landed country gentlemen, for more than two centuries past and gone.

Sir Matthew was approaching his grand climacteric before he found either leisure or inclination for the cares and joys of matrimony. He was not an intellectual character (individuals claiming to be placed in that category were, as all the world knows, less common a hundred years ago than they are at present), and Sir

Matthew was undeniably one of the many millions destined at their birth *de faire foule*, as the French say, and nothing more. No shining light, in short, was honest-hearted, unread, blunt of speech Sir Matthew, whose heart was in his kennel, and the care of whose estate was sufficient occupation for his head.

He fell in love at last, however,—“over head and ears,” as he himself expressed it; fell in love, too, in that congenial place, the hunting-field, for there was no resisting a young lady who “stuck to her saddle” like a man, and who took her leaps on her mare Fenella to the admiration of the field in general, and to that of Sir Mat’s favourite whipper-in in especial.

Lady Fendall, as we have seen, did not, after her marriage, abandon the pursuit which had won for her the affections of the bachelor baronet: but, nevertheless, and attached as she was to the sports of the field, the days when she followed the hounds in a scarlet riding-habit were fewer when a little Matthew made his appearance, to be caressed in the nursery, and displayed proudly to milady’s visitors in the drawing-room.

Still, notwithstanding this dearly-loved hindrance to her out-of-door amusements, it is

society honoured her either with its notice or its comments.

The education of little Matthew was in some respects peculiar, for it was conducted under the very eyes of Lady Fendall, who was a mother little likely to spoil even an only child—a widow's son—by over-indulgence. No precocious evidences of early talent gleamed from the uncrammed, healthy brain of the young baronet; and not the faintest, vaguest notion of his own importance was allowed to inflate the mind of the little fellow, whose simple hardy rearing bade fair to produce a vigorous and useful shoot.

Being herself a woman who entertained an objection to being thwarted or hindered in the attainment of any object on which she had set her mind, it followed as a natural consequence that self-abnegation and self-control grew to be amongst the habits of the young lad's life; for it was one of Lady Fendall's favourite maxims (she was rather given to wise saws, and to *ancient* instances), that by accustoming a child betimes to the endurance of small daily disappointments and privations, you may best prepare him to support the great and unavoidable trials of life.

Thus, with no thorns removed from his path

by injudicious and over-careful hands, the boy advanced to manhood. He evinced no predilection for the amusement to which he owed his early orphanage, but moved thereto by the example and training of the quiet tutor who made the third in the old library at the Hall, he showed betimes a taste for books and simple pleasures. But although thus unadventurous in his pursuits and retiring in his habits, there was nothing unmanly about Lady Fendall's home-raised son. He was an encourager, amongst his tenantry, of all the rustic sports and games for which the British peasant in the olden time was known to have so keen a relish. For there was no pride about him, so the country people said, inasmuch as it was his custom to join freely with the tenants on his estate in many of their healthy exercises and amusements. So the retainers of Hazel Combe to a man, and, above all, to a boy, held their "young bar'net" in high estimation, becoming still more emphatic in their praise as their landlord grew to man's estate; and declaring, many a time and often, that Sir Matthew was a Fendall every inch of him, and would do honour to the long respected race from whence he had sprung.

CHAPTER II.

ONE TAKEN AND THE OTHER LEFT.

SIR MATTHEW FENDALL was a very young man—younger perhaps even than his years—when he was moved by sundry cogent family reasons to think seriously of changing his domestic estate, and enrolling himself amongst the married members of society.

That he fell in love betimes with one well worthy to inspire a passion as fervent as it gave promise to be lasting, will speedily be shown ; but if it be deemed necessary to account still further for Sir Matthew's early relinquishment of the pleasures of bachelorhood, I may state in this place, that he had the misfortune to be—to the best of his knowledge and belief—the last of his race and name.

For generations past the Fendalls of Hazel Combe had been remarkable for the smallness of their families : and few, therefore, were the collateral heirs of those respectable English

gentlemen who, from father to son, had been the lawful possessors of the broad downy uplands stretching on every side around the Combe (or *hollow*) in which was situated their comfortable and time-honoured abode.

Under these circumstances it was natural enough that Lady Fendall should, even from his infancy, have decided that her son's early marriage was a duty he owed to his family, his county, and himself; and that, acting on this conviction, she should have lost no time in looking round her for a fitting sharer in the Fendall honours.

"My dearest Mat," she would remark to the obedient son, who was as dutiful in his manhood as when, in his tender years, she administered the useful correction on which the wise Judaic monarch set such store. "My dearest Mat, we are very happy as we are, and, were it not for the property and the fine old title, I should never wish for change; but the Fendalls of Hazel Combe must not become extinct in the land, and, therefore, a daughter-in-law is—" she was about to say "a necessary evil," but she checked herself in time, and substituted the more agreeably-sounding words, "a blessing for which I must lose no time in seeking."

To this opinion, her son, as in duty bound, did not hesitate to subscribe; and thus it came about that, at the age of twenty-two, Sir Matthew Fendall became a candidate for matrimony.

The Lady Janetta Western, the maiden on whom the eyes of both mother and son had approvingly fallen, was the daughter of an impoverished nobleman, who owned a vast extent of mortgaged land adjoining the estate of Hazel Combe. It was what is called a princely property, that of which the Earl of Westerham was the nominal proprietor; but unfortunately for himself, and for the sons and daughters who were amongst his few unmortgaged possessions, the actual income realised from wood and valley, farms and tenements, water privileges and land ditto, was far from commensurate with the nominal rent-roll.

The three young ladies of the house, who had grown up to womanhood since their father's squandering days were over, lived contentedly enough in their country home; inasmuch as the wearing, tearing, questionable delights of London seasons were happily unknown to them.

They were not ambitious—a blessed negative

quality in womanhood—and could enjoy the simple pleasures of a simple country life with a zest and freshness pleasant to behold. But this blessed spirit of contentment was not shared by their parents, neither of whom ever appeared particularly satisfied with the lot to which their united extravagances had condemned themselves and their family. Lady Westerham, of the two, certainly felt the change in their fortunes the most: for by dwelling on her woes, her nerves and spirits had been weakened; whilst Lord Westerham only maintained in public the air of good-humoured jollity and *insouciance* which had not a little assisted to procure for him, in his day, so world-wide a popularity.

As regarded society, the young ladies at Westerham Abbey might truly be said to lead a dull life; for the great wrought-iron gates were rarely open to visitors, and the unwilling recluses were seldom allowed to accept invitations from the few *visitable* people in their division of the county. The cause of this almost complete retirement from the world was understood to be that Lord Westerham was endeavouring, by strict attention to economy, to bring the property *round* for the benefit of his son, Lord Amberton; but, if this were so, the

difficult task of *squaring* accounts, in order to produce this desirable result, was one rarely undertaken by the earl himself; for that joyous-mannered gentleman, with whom indolence was a besetting sin, left his affairs to be settled by his agent, in whose honesty and talent for management he had unbounded confidence.

Lady Janetta was the youngest and the prettiest of the daughters. She was a shy, blushing, and rather nervous creature, with wonderful eyes, and what novelists are pleased to designate as a fawn-like glance. A pretty figure too, upright and slight—one of those figures that the gentlemen of the hunt called *staggy*, and which may with equal appropriateness be described as “thorough-bred.”

Sir Matthew saw her at a hunt ball, and fell in love with her at once. His mother saw the secret even before the lad (for he was little more) acknowledged the pleasant, teasing truth to his own heart; and as there was no reserve between the two, she taxed him with it.

Sir Matthew blushed to the very tips of his ears under the accusation.

“Mother,” he said, apologetically, “she is so very pretty. Don’t you think so?”

“Pretty—yes. A little dollish though, and a

poor creature—and you know nothing of her disposition, my dear. Besides, I don't quite like the stock," she added, musingly; "she may take to spending right and left, like those that have gone before her."

Sir Matthew did not seem to think such a proceeding probable on Lady Janetta's part, and indeed he was right there; for Lord Westerham's daughters were in greater danger of becoming over careful than of falling into the opposite extreme. They had never known the time when care for money, thought of money, and talk of money, had not been the leading, and, indeed, for that matter, the sole excitements in their father's house. Of this fact, however, Lady Fendall was not cognizant, and dreading the force of example, as well as of hereditary disposition, she trembled a little at the thought of placing the sceptre of her power—her wand of office—and the keys of state (for Lady Fendall, in good old-fashioned style, superintended all the household affairs at Hazel Combe) into the sadly weak hands of a Western of Westerham. But she was a good woman, and a tender mother, therefore her objections only went the length of increasing her son's desire for success; and as Lord Westerham, far from

refusing to bestow his daughter's hand on the well-to-do young baronet, would probably have thrown the Ladies Elizabeth and Amabel into the scale to make up for Janetta's slender weight—the preliminaries to the marriage were at once commenced, and the course of love ran smoothly and unruffled.

They were strong contrasts in character, those two women, who for years seemed to vie with each other in spoiling, indulging, and worshipping the man from whose kindly nature, and cheerful, happy temperament, both were willing to draw their all of this world's bliss. At first Lady Fendall had been very jealous of her daughter-in-law—had thought her yielding, weakness; and had almost hated her, when the young wife hung about her husband full of loving playfulness, and guided him as easily as though he had been a simple child. But it was not in human nature, and certainly not in that of Lady Fendall, to withstand the guileless sweetness, mingled with unpretending common sense, which formed the chief component parts of Lady Janetta's character; and so the wife and mother grew to have but one object between them, and that one was, as I have said, to make their darling Matthew happy.

It was three years before any likelihood appeared of Lady Janetta's adding to the now nearly exhausted stock of the Fendalls of Hazel Combe; but even this dereliction from duty was overlooked by Lady Fendall in the quiet home enjoyment, to which the young wife had so largely added. But when the happy moment did arrive, and when a "man was born into the world" to inherit the family estates and honours, then Lady Janetta did indeed reign supreme, and Lady Fendall felt she had never truly loved her daughter until then.

A year elapsed, and all was in readiness for the birth of another claimant for the doating grandmother's affection. Again was the portly nurse engaged to rustle in her cumbrous garments in the spacious nurseries of the Combe, and again was the good old doctor, who had introduced Sir Matthew into this world of care, warned that his services would shortly be required of him, and that he must hold himself and his mahogany top-boots in readiness to ride to Hazel Combe at moment's notice.

It came, that time so anxiously expected, yet not dreaded, even by the delicate young mother, who looked to her hour's coming as to a "prime of bliss." It came, and it passed away, and again the

feeble cry that rose upon the mother's listening ear was that of a man child, with vigorous lungs, and noble—I use the nurse's words—chest and limbs.

Sir Matthew looked with little interest at the flannelly bundle, with a small red spot in the midst of it, which the nurse told him was a human face, but he was very grateful for leave to kiss his wife, and whisper just three tender words into her ear, before the autocrats of the sick room hurried him from her presence ruthlessly.

A week—nay more, ten days—elapsed, and Lady Janetta was allowed to sit upright and peep between her curtains at Sir Matthew, who had, with considerable difficulty, obtained permission to write his letters, silently, at a distant table in the room.

He had been very patient, obeying the nurse's and his mother's orders to the letter, but when his last dispatch was sealed and sent, he thought he would just indulge in one fond look before he left the room, upon that sweet, girlish face, smiling there so near him over her own great happiness, and at the tiny treasure which the nurse had laid beside her.

He stole on tiptoe to the bed, for she lay very still, and he more than half believed that,

propped up comfortably by the downy pillows, his love lay sleeping there, forgetful of his presence.

Sleeping!—ay, that she was indeed, sleeping the sleep that knows no waking, whilst he was near, who would have shed his heart's best blood to save her, and would have died himself sooner than not receive her parting sigh!

It was in the spring she died, that most blessed wife and mother, whose five-and-twenty summers had not yet been fully spent; and ere they placed her in the grave they laid sweet violets on her sinless breast, filling her coffin with the breath of fragrant flowers.

And since that mournful day, and while each passing winter shed its snows upon the widower's head, the memory of his early love remained for ever fresh and green within his breast—fresh and green as when the village maidens strewed bright roses in her bridal path—sad and mournful as at the dismal hour when her fair corpse was borne away for burial, and he was left to weep!

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST SORROW.

LADY JANETTA'S first-born son had, as a matter of course, been christened Matthew, after the manner of his forefathers. There had been neither question nor discussion on that head between the father and the grandmother, whose sentiments were so generally in unison : but in regard to the younger born the case was different ; for whereas Sir Matthew was desirous to call his little one by the name of John, the *masculine*, as he averred, of the loved and soft-sounding word "Janetta," Lady Fendall objected strongly to the appellation, as being not only plebeian *per se*, but offensive as regarded its probable degeneration into Jack, or the scarcely more ingratiating *petit nom* of Johnnie.

"Which signifies, or at least John does, 'by the grace of God,'" rejoined the father ; "I have read that so it is ; and may He grant that my poor motherless son may be cared for, even


as she would have cared for it ; and may live to be a blessing unto those whom the Almighty has seen fit to chasten."

So, in accordance with his father's will (as was both right and fitting), the child was called after its dead mother. The infants were, in the early days of his bereavement, kept sedulously from the father's sight ; for the latter's grief was, inasmuch as his years were few, and his experience in affliction small, very loud and terrible : but the first days of agony, and disgust to life and all that this world can give, melted by degrees into weeks of dull and unvarying dejection, till they, in their turn, merged into the months and years when joy broke forth from amongst the clouds of heaviness. For Time's untiring footsteps trod out something of affection's marks, and, to those who looked upon the surface only, the young wife might seem to be almost forgotten.

Lady Fendall mourned sincerely the loss of her gentle daughter-in-law ; but, besides that, the former was, as we have seen, a woman little likely to yield weakly to her grief ; she had, at the period following Lady Janetta's death, a more than usual amount of business on her hands. There was Sir Matthew to arouse and

comfort ; *his* duties (which were neglected in the first shock of his affliction) to fulfil ; and, more important still, there were the children to attend to,—and, alas, too soon, to *spoil*. For Lady Fendall, like many a grandmother who has been sensibly rigid with her own children, was weak as a “rope of sand” when it became a question whether little Mat was to have his way, or Johnnie to be instructed in the difficult task of passive obedience. And so it came to pass that before many years had rolled over their heads, the ruling of the house passed, in a great measure, into the hands of two headstrong and determined young gentlemen ; whilst Lady Fendall, when it was too late, began to see that both she and Sir Matthew had made a series of irretrievable mistakes.


Till the boys had arrived at the respective ages of thirteen and fourteen, their education had been conducted—as the phrase goes—by a tutor at home. But gradually the two young tyrants grew beyond the feeble managing powers of the worthy man who had been set in authority over them ; and as there was no higher court of appeal to which he could refer with any chance of strengthening his hands, the conscientious man gave in his resignation.



“And if you will allow me to offer a piece of very well-meant advice, Sir Matthew,” concluded Mr. Patterson,—who perhaps rather enjoyed the idea of his quondam pupils being paid off by stronger hands for their many revolts against his authority,—“if you will not think it a liberty on my part, I would strongly recommend that the young gentlemen should be sent to a good school. You see that Lady Fendall is——is——so very much attached to them, that——”

“That she could not bear to part with them, I fear,” interrupted Sir Matthew; “and, indeed, the house would seem dull enough without the boys. I could not let my little Johnnie go, whatever you might do with Mat. Mat is a stronger fellow, and could rough it better; but I will speak to Lady Fendall. Perhaps if only Matthew goes, you may think over what you said again, and stay to finish Johnnie’s education, Mr. Patterson?”

Now the tutor was decidedly what is called living in clover at Hazel Combe, and he was by no means desirous of giving up his comfortable berth, provided always that he could retain the same conscientiously, and be safe from what appeared to the timid man the often positively



dangerous aggressions of the reckless boys. His answer to Sir Matthew was therefore in the affirmative; but both question and answer might have been spared, since nothing that either father or grandmother could urge had power to induce Johnnie to stay at Hazel Combe without his brother.

"I can't help it, grannie," he would say, in answer to Lady Fendall's remonstrances; "I'm very fond of you, and all that, and I don't want to make my father unhappy, but I won't stay here without Mat—that's poz. I should hate the place, and hang myself in a week. Now, grannie, you know I should; for there 'd be nobody to play cricket but papa and me, and old Patterson. You couldn't play, now, could you, grannie dear?"


And the spoilt, but affectionate boy threw his arms round Lady Fendall's neck, and inflicted a series of boisterous kisses on her still fresh cheeks.

Of course he was allowed to follow the dictates of his own will, and in another week silence reigned in the old house; for the boys were away at Eton (it was the return after the Eton holidays), and Sir Matthew and his mother were once more *tête-à-tête* in the rooms which

had so lately echoed to the roof with joyous shouts and laughter.

A dismal and a dreary time, both for the father and the busy grandame, followed on that greatly regretted separation. They did not openly confess the melancholy truth, but they missed the boys at every turn and moment; and Sir Matthew especially, whose nature was clinging and tender as a woman's, could have almost groaned at the sight of cricket-bats lying by useless now, and targets uprearing their round faces in the grassy glade, with no young "foresters" to aim a glancing arrow at the bull's-eye. It was indeed a wasted spring to poor Sir Matthew, the first that since their birth he had spent far from the company of his boys. He had no pleasure now in wandering through the beech woods with his old truffle dog, Mince Pie—called so by Johnnie, no one knew for why; and when the creature stopped and snuffed the ground, he did not care a "rap" to know whether the brute's instinct told him true or false.

He wrote all this to Matthew and to Johnnie in quiet, simple language from his heart. He told them, too, the trifling news about their home—how he had found a robin's nest just in the



same place where Mat had rejoiced over a similar discovery in the spring, when they were all together; and then he dwelt upon how much he missed his boys, and longed to have them once more in the old place.

He sent his letters off, and waited for the answers—waited for days, and even weeks, sorrowing to think how soon his sons had ceased to care for home and homely pleasures.

At last a few scrawled lines arrived from Matthew. They said he was quite well (an interesting piece of intelligence, as he probably deemed it), and that he had been playing at cricket, and was learning to swim. The letter was soon read, and then there came the all-important postscript, in which Matthew wrote that he would be very much obliged to his dear papa for a little money, as he had been obliged to buy a great many things: and that “other fellows’ allowances were much larger, ever so much larger,—why Lord Frederic Flamworth had three times as much as he had, and fellows thought him shabby,” &c., &c.

Sir Matthew had had no experience of school-life, and very little of boys’ characters and proceedings. He did not know that, as a rule, the troubles caused by the male species to their

parents date from the moment that sons are able to stand upon two legs, and that directly the boy ceases to be a plaything, fathers, if they do not take care to hold their own courageously, become unmistakeably the played-upon. It was unfortunate, now that Sir Matthew stood in the dignified position of *pater familias*, that he should be thus deplorably ignorant of the ways of the juvenile world; but so it was: and there is something touching in the record, that when the inexperienced father read the almost bullying appeal, he felt no anger, but only blamed himself for niggardliness, and thought how hard it was upon the boys that they should have been driven to such painful shifts.

The question of an increased allowance was soon settled to the satisfaction of the young Etonians; but even then no letters came in answer to their father's loving ones,—none, at least, till Johnnie, who was his father's darling, wrote a sort of copy of the missive which had been so successful on the first occasion in producing the larger allowance craved for by the insatiate lads.

Lady Fendall shook her head ominously as she read the postscript which stood at the bottom of the second page of Johnnie's simple,

boyish letter. She was not, as we have seen, a foolish woman, and the separation from the boys, by weening her in some sort from the daily interest of their presence, had caused her to see all that concerned them in a clearer point of view.

"Matthew," she said, as they sat together at breakfast, with the great silver urn hissing between them—"Matthew, I hope we have made no mistake about the boys. I shouldn't like our little Johnnie to be spoilt."

Sir Matthew moved uneasily in his chair.

"The child writes nicely," he said, looking proudly at the straight lines and well-spelt words.

"Nicely! Why, Matthew, do you really think that Johnnie wrote that letter?"

"Why, who should write it?" asked her son, looking up above the steam which rose from the tall urn, in hopes to catch a glimpse of Lady Fendall's face.

"Who? Why some bigger boy, some dangerous lad who preys upon poor Johnnie, and who wrote this letter to make you think how much the little fellow was improved. Look here: he says, 'I am fagging very hard, and have taken great pains with my writing to please my dear papa.'"

"And it does please me," murmured poor Sir Matthew, who thought his mother rather harsh and suspicious. "It does please me, and I really think that those m's and n's are Johnnie's. No, I'm sure the little lad would not deceive me. Mother, you fancy things about the boys. We'll have them home at Midsummer, and then, please God, we shall both see that they are doing well, and none the worse for going from the Combe."

The summer came, the hot bright, summer, when the shade of the great spreading beech-trees was so welcome; and when, in the balmy evenings, Sir Matthew and his mother wandered slowly to and fro in the pleasant fir-wood, or lingered on the banks of the small lake which could be seen from the windows of the Combe.

"They will be here to-morrow!" said Lady Fendall, as with her arm resting on her son's, they bent their steps, in the still lingering twilight, towards the house.

Sir Matthew pressed the hand that lay on his, affectionately. He had a great, nay, an almost womanish longing for sympathy; and there can be little doubt that if, in some of his lonely hours, the right chord had been touched by the right hand of some fair, tender daughter

of Eve, he would have ceased to be a lonely-hearted man, and his wife's place in his affections would have been filled up. But, strange as it may appear, Sir Matthew, young though he still was, had long begun to consider himself as a middle-aged man. The possession, too, of those precocious, domineering boys, growing so fast to man's estate, confirmed him in his impressions of himself; and so it was that, though still under forty, Sir Matthew felt that his own days of youth were gone for ever.

“Yes, they will be here to-morrow,” he said, in answer to his mother's remark; “and pretty early in the day, I hope. What happiness it will be to see their cheery faces! And everything is looking well and ready for them. The boats newly painted, and new bats and balls; and such a target! Mother, I feel I am a boy again, and could well nigh fancy all that's past and gone since I was a child myself, is but a painful dream!”

CHAPTER IV.

SIR MATTHEW'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

IF years, instead of months, had elapsed since the heir of Hazel Combe and his small brother had left their father's roof, a greater change could scarcely have been manifested than that noticed by their grandmother when she, the first to welcome their return, met the Etonians beneath the portico of the Combe.

Sir Matthew had, to his exceeding disappointment, been unexpectedly summoned from home on business. He was very sorry—he could not but own he was—he had looked forward with such truly parental pleasure to the spectacle of their raptures, and he was selfish enough to grudge his mother the first sight of Johnnie's beaming face, and the hearing of Mat's wild shout of pleasure at the sight of the well-remembered scenes of all their boyish enjoyments.

The period of which I write being prior to the days of railroads, it was for the purpose of

meeting the London "Stage" that the old family coachman, who had driven the steady-going bays (bay was the invariable colour of the Hazel Combe horses for forty years and upwards), was dispatched to Hillingstone, to be in readiness for the conveyance of the young gentlemen to the Combe.

Hillingstone, which was about six miles distant from Sir Matthew's residence, was a place of no inconsiderable importance, since it possessed its market-place and court-house; its places of worship, of more description than one; and shops which might almost vie, in point of size and show, with those of the cathedral city of C—— itself.

The Fendall family were highly considered in Hillingstone, the townspeople of which ancient town looked up to them with a blind veneration, which was more commonly bestowed upon landed proprietors fifty years ago than it is at present; but then it must be remembered that the Fendalls had property which extended almost to the streets of Hillingstone; and that outside the town, upon the London Road, there was a goodly row of almshouses, erected and supported by the liberality of Sir Matthew's ancestress.

"These almshouses were built for the sheltering and support of twelve aged women, by Dame Henrietta Fendall, in the year of our Lord 1712.

"He that giveth unto y^e poor lendeth unto y^e Lord."

So ran the inscription on the middle tenement of the row; and so large was the engraved testimony to Dame Henrietta's charity, that those who ran might read it.

For the thousandth time did the eyes of the two Eton lads, as they stared from out the windows of the dust-covered coach, glance over the quaintly written text, and many minutes did not elapse after they had caught sight of the welcome announcement of their home's proximity, when the "Highflyer" rattled up Broad Street; and the boys found themselves ushered, with a satisfactory show of respect, into the best parlour of the "Bull Inn."

It looked hot and dull, and smelt dusty, so that Johnnie, who was rather fastidious, turned up his small nose in disgust.

"I say—isn't this cool of old Peter?" he said, as, after throwing open the window, he leant out, and looked inquiringly up and down the street. "I'll answer for it, he's in some tap or other—

keeping us here in this horrid hole. It's too bad!"

"It's a confounded bore," responded Mat, "and I shall tell my father so. That fellow—" (*fellow!* speaking of the ancient servitor whose cauliflower wig had graced his brows any time these fifty years!)"—"that fellow has had his own way too long, and I shall have to pull him up, I see."

But a change came over the countenances of the two young gentlemen when they caught sight, at the extremity of the High Street, of dignified old Peter, seated on his elevated driving seat, with the massive purple hammer-cloth hanging in rich folds, and forming, with its deep golden fringe, a becoming background to the well-fed calves which rested against its wealth of broad-cloth.

The little town boys, who were born with a share of the organ of veneration peculiar to the men of Hillingstone, had a great respect for the Hazel Combe coachman. There was something so regal in his wig, and so imposing in the sheen of his amber-coloured nether garments, that hats and caps were touched to him, and to the panels of the carriage, even when "Milady" did not sit (as was her custom) bolt upright upon the

cushions, and Sir Matthew was not nodding affably from the window at the lower orders of the people.

The feeling, unexpressed it is true, but still existing, of veneration for the antiquated retainer was shared, and that to a large extent, by the boys who had often in the days of their childhood—days which they looked back to now as long since passed away—suffered coercion at his hands. Well did they recollect the many deprivations of their much coveted rides which they had endured at the hands of the omnipotent Peter, whose rule in stable matters not even Sir Matthew himself ever thought of disputing; and now, when they saw his portly figure looming in its large respectability in the distance, the old awe took possession of them; and the Etonians subsiding into silence, wondered at the empty threats which, during his absence, they had ventured to launch against that unwieldly potentate.

“Well they do be growed into fine young gentlemen, surely!” was the remark of the aged housekeeper, who had been a woman grown when Sir Matthew was an infant. “And so quiet like to what they was. Well, well—there be nothing like schooling to give young folks manners.”

Mrs. Denton was justified in her remark, that a few months at a great public school (that great spirit level, where each one finds his place, and where even merit must not dare to raise its head for fear of that young commonwealth's displeasure) had greatly improved, at least in outward seeming, the condition of those two noisy, boisterous boys. They had learnt much of worldly knowledge since they left their childhood's home: and amongst other arts that which had come the easiest—as indeed it does to most of us—had been the often practised one of dissembling. The boys were ashamed now to show their puerile pleasure in their former sports—the cricket games were *slow* after the great Eton matches, and the bats not worth the handling. Sir Matthew looked with saddened eyes upon his altered sons, when he perceived that all his little plans for their amusement had failed to produce the pleasure he had hoped for. But if he grieved over the dull glance that Mat had cast upon the “clumsy” boat, which lay bright in her new coat of paint upon the wavelets of the lake, how much more bitter were his feelings when the hour of rest had come, and when the two lads (whose wont it had been, child-like to leave their only parent with a parting kiss,) held

out, with sheepish, blushing faces, their stiff small hands, by way of a "last good night."

It was not Johnnie's fault, for he had a tender heart within the little frame which was so much weaker than his bigger brother's: but he was afraid of ridicule, and *chaff*. The *name* had not been coined in those days, but the *thing* existed—the powerful, dangerous, although seemingly innocuous weapon which has done more, ten thousand thousand times, to turn the weak to evil, than tongues of preachers, howsoever eloquent, have been able to effect for human good.

It is not necessary to the full comprehending of my story to dwell at any greater length upon the youthful doings of Sir Matthew's sons. It took some little time, and some exertion of his small amount of philosophical reasoning, to reconcile the father (whose happiness it had been to feel that he had *children*) to the fact that his boys were growing independent of his care; and ashamed (at least, they seemed so) of his affection. But Sir Matthew was, as I have endeavoured to show, one of the least selfish of human beings; and his thoughts were soon diverted from his own feelings, by dwelling upon the increasing demands which the advancing ages of Mat and

little Johnnie caused those young gentlemen to make, both upon his attention, and his purse.

They were fine lads, especially the eldest, who took after his father in height, strength of limb, and breadth of chest. He was good-looking, too, though in rather a countrified and rubicund fashion. The housemaids at the Combe, and indeed most of the country damsels round about, considered Mr. Fendall, when he had arrived at the manly age of eighteen, as the type of beauty and vigour: and as in this opinion the elder son himself fully concurred, it will not be considered wonderful that Master Mat determined, in spite of the opposing wishes of his father, and of the grandmother—whose love of rule had in no measure lessened with advancing years—to enter the army as a cornet of dragoons.

Johnnie's tastes were, happily for his home-loving relations, of a different character; and the time was past and gone when his boyish admiration for his brother's strength of limb and will had led him to follow blindly in his elder's footsteps. They were as different in appearance as two brothers so nearly of an age could be; for Johnnie, whose childhood had been marked by many a lengthened illness, was small of stature, and of a delicate and even nervous

constitution. He was morbidly sensitive, too, regarding his personal appearance, contrasting his rather diminutive features and sallow complexion with the healthy colouring and marked handsome lineaments of the more nature-favoured Matthew.

There was a small living (the church was in the grounds) in Sir Matthew's gift ; and it was intended—following the time-honoured custom of centuries—that the second son should step into the comfortable rectory-house directly the regular course of a university education should have fitted him to become—

“ A messenger of grace to guilty men.”

And so the future fortunes of Lady Janetta's sons, in so far as they could be moulded by the finite hands of mortals, were decided on ; and a year after the young cornet had joined his regiment, which was then quartered in the north of England, Johnnie began his preparations for his college career, with what feelings of satisfaction the following chapter will tend probably to make evident to the reader.

CHAPTER V.

THE RECTOR OF COMBE HATTON.

JOHNNIE (he was habitually called by that affectionately-sounding appellation) had been for some months previously to his entrance at Christ Church College, reading, as it is called, with the learned clergyman who held the living which would one day be *his*.

Mr. Santland, the Rector of Combe Hatton, was more distinguished as a man of letters than as a divine. He had taken the highest honours at Oxford, was a first-rate classical scholar, and a poet of no mean order ; and yet, although his powers, both of genius and of memory, were universally acknowledged, and in some respects done justice to, Mr. Santland, to the surprise of many, remained, at the age of forty, with no certain preferment, save a small perpetual curacy in the neighbourhood of Hillingstone, and with no apparent prospect of obtaining any further advancement in a profession for which many of

his warmest admirers considered him to be significantly unfitted.

A wonderfully entertaining, as well as an improving companion, was the holder of Johnnie's future rectory of Combe Hatton. With Sir Matthew, and his clear-headed and active-minded mother, he was an amazing favourite, for he was equally at home in the discussion of serious as of lively topics, while his store of general information on all subjects rendered him an invaluable assistant in the task of preparing Johnnie for the profession he was to follow.

That there was another side of the picture—a dusty, dingy side, which could ill support the glaring light of day—was a fact which had more than once been broadly hinted at: and that there lay hidden, far from human ken, a fearful skeleton in the wifeless home of Mr. Santland, was a fact which was never disputed in the neighbourhood of Hillingstone. The Fendall family had heard these reports, and utterly disbelieved them, an act of faith which was a consequence partly of Sir Matthew and Lady Fendall's ignorance of the dark errors of a wicked world, and partly of the high-bred bearing and calm superiority arrogated by this family friend, even in the moments when an almost childish

playfulness of manner enhanced the brilliancy of his conversation.

After this short introduction to one whose influence was not without its importance in the household I have been describing, I shall request my reader to imagine himself one autumn afternoon in the very prettiest of well-cared-for flower-gardens, in the midst of which stood the Rectory-house of Combe Hatton. Mr. Santland was not only an excellent botanist, but he was passionately fond of flowers, loving them as he did all gay and beautiful things; so that his borders were still glowing with brilliant-coloured blossoms, late-blowing roses, and the queenly dahlia holding her stately head above them all, whilst in her quill-like petals the glittering drops left by a passing shower glistened like diamonds in the sun's rays.

The Rector, who was dressed in strictly clerical costume (he was a tall and striking-looking man, not handsome, for his face was only redeemed from plainness by its intellectuality), had been for some time walking slowly side by side with the pupil who was about to leave his teaching, and enter upon other and more exciting scenes.

They had not been talking much: friends are often silent when they are on the eve of parting,

and such was the case at present, for in two days Johnnie was to bid adieu to Hazel Combe.

They had been taking several turns in silence, when the Rector said, musingly—

“After all, I almost wish I were a college tutor.”

“Do you?” asked his companion, eagerly. “Ah! I cannot really think it. Such actual drudgery, is it not? And you tried it once, I think you told me, and abandoned it in disgust.”

“Yes; the fellows who came to read were such clods—such *tutors*!—but now——”

“Ah! how kind you are! And to me, how pleasant it would be. Fancy your being there—my tutor still! instead of a stranger, who will despise my ignorance, and worry me into still greater stupidity!”

“No chance of that,” said Mr. Santland, cheerfully; “and be so good as to remember, my dear fellow, that the unjust world is apt to pronounce its verdict on us according to our own opinion of our merits; so that I strongly advise you to make a favourable charge to the jury regarding your own claims to a merciful consideration. Besides, you pay my tutorship, as well as your own talents, a poor compliment, by such uncalled-for humility. You are very

tolerably up in classics—my forte, you know—and as to mathematics—well, you must go on working. And when the college dons know that a man goes in for honours, and keeps out of scrapes, they give him every encouragement, as I know by past experience.”

There was a pause, during which, judging from the change that passed over the wise man's face, some tyrannic thought, one that made “other thoughts its slave,” flashed across his mind, and held him for the moment silent and spell-bound. His pupil looked up furtively at the expressive, saddened countenance of him on whose opinion and counsels he so implicitly relied, and a feeling of discouragement began to take the place of some vague visions of enjoyment in which he had before, albeit half unknown to himself, indulged, whilst dwelling on the chances of the future.

He was not of a sanguine temperament, that delicately constituted youth, the last year of whose life had been spent in rather arduous study; and the approaching change in his everyday existence, now that the time for bidding farewell to his home and all its tranquil scenes drew near, filled his habitually thoughtful mind with something like dismay. It was, as I have

said, an autumn day, one full of that quietness and beauty of which, at the close of the year, a few are sometimes given to remind us, that even in the sere and yellow leaf of age there are appropriate enjoyments for those who are willing to be satisfied with pleasures suited to their decaying powers.

They were lingering beneath the slanting gleams of the declining October sun, the rays of which fell full upon the tall but slightly stooping figure of the tutor. Johnnie, as I have before said, glanced upward at his face, and was struck by his changed mournfulness. Involuntarily, too, he contrasted that finely shaped head, and powerful massive brow, with his own feeble appearance, his colourless lineaments, and his uncommanding stature, and a sigh, compounded of regret and envy, escaped him.

Santland laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder, and turning him round as though he had been a child, held Johnnie before him on the broad gravel walk where they two remained stationary.

"I suppose," began the Rector, looking keenly at his pupil, "that like every well-organised young man, you intend to seek for pleasure when you leave this quiet spot, where we all

vegetate as innocently, and of course I ought to say as happily, as the sheep that browse in your father's park, or the—the geese that graze upon the common.”

Johnnie's pale cheek flushed as he met the searching, half sarcastic eye which'looked with such an inquiring scrutiny into his. Words wherewith to reply to Santland's question did not come at his command, but, instead, he gave utterance to the feeling—the joint offspring of envy and humility—which, almost ever since the departure of his brother, had been growing like some unwholesome plant within him.

“ You ask me,” he said, “ if I shall become a seeker after pleasure. Me! The poor younger brother—the one who has received from nature not a tithe of the good gifts which Matthew has enjoyed from boyhood. The elder son! What a strong magic is there in those words! And then, in everything Fortune has favoured him so highly! Don't think that I am envious, Mr. Santland: I am only wondering at the curious contrast in our two lives—my brother's and my own.”

He spoke with bitterness, for he fancied that a sneer had pointed Mr. Santland's innocent remark with poison.

“Poor fellow!” (These were the words in which his morbid sensibility had caused him to embody his tutor’s thoughts). “Poor fellow! With his appearance, his sensitiveness, and his awkward manner, how wretched will be the effect he will produce upon his new companions, how endless will be his mortifications, and who will have patience to remove their sting? What man will offer to so weak a reed his friendship?—and what woman can ever give her heart to one so destitute of all that can delight the eye, or charm the fancy?”

There was an intense and corroding depression within the lad’s mind, as his morbid imagination lent these reflections to his friend.

“And yet,” so he whispered to himself, “God has given me a brain to reflect, a heart to feel, and—”

But here his reverie (it had lasted but a moment or two, so swift is thought’s electric passage) was interrupted by Santland remarking, abruptly—

“You will be a happy man, Johnnie, when these next few years shall have passed away, and when you will return to do the duty here, better far than I have been able to perform it.”

Fendall had turned from his tutor, and was

throwing some pebbles, which he had hastily picked up to hide the workings of his countenance, into a small piece of ornamental water which stood in the centre of the garden.

“Are you attached to this place?” he said : “but I need not ask, when you have so lately compared our existence here to that of the brainless animals who crop the herb around us. Mr. Santland!” he continued with sudden energy, “will you think me altogether heartless, and unpardonably discontented, when I say that, to me, life here is so unutterably wearisome, that I care not if I never set my foot within the grounds of Hazel Combe again?”

A shadow of a smile might have been just visible on the tutor's lips as he listened to this avowal, but he was well skilled in the art of controlling the expression of the features, and Johnnie perceived neither triumph nor amusement in the face or voice of his astute companion.

“Never again?” he repeated slowly : “and it is the home where your kind father lives—the home of your childhood, and—”

“The spot where, since I have ceased to be a child, I have known nothing but tedium, mortification, and disappointment ! What is the pros-

pect that life holds out to me?" he added, with increasing vehemence. "As boys, Matthew and I seemed equal—our sports the same, our interests quite alike; but since we have been growing up to manhood I have felt the mighty difference—the tremendous gulf that rolls between an elder and a younger son."

"My dear Johnnie," said Mr. Santland, gravely, "there must be some other reason, besides your weariness of this verdant prison, to account for such rebellious sentiments as these. There has been some wandering stream of wind, I fear, which has brought intoxicating perfumes to your senses—perfumes of love and beauty, which have risen to your brain, and made wild havoc there."

Again the blood rose up to Johnnie's cheek and brow, for he was a very tyro in the science of concealing his emotions. He answered Mr. Santland's observation, however, rather roughly, by saying—

"I have no wish to talk about Lillias, Mr. Santland—no wish to speak of the past. I suppose you saw it all—saw that—"

"That the young lady smiled upon you sweetly, saucily, encouragingly, till—"

"Till my brother came—my brother, with his

grand airs, and six-feet-two of height, his military profession, which women prize so highly that, upon my soul, I think they take a fellow's heroism for granted directly he puts on a military coat, and so begin to bend their knees in hero-worship as eagerly as though he had come out unscathed from half a hundred fights."

"And is this all?" responded the Rector, again laying his arm soothingly on the shoulder of the excited lad. "Johnnie, my dear boy, you have indeed much to learn, which further insight into the strange, mysterious world of women's hearts will teach you. Why, for all these months, as I believe, when you have been moping about the paternal groves, like a most melancholy Jaques, you have been sighing over a silly girl's caprices; when, had you known the sea a little better—Ah! well, nothing but experience teaches youngsters in these matters, and you will find far prettier girls than little pale-faced Lillias, who will prefer a younger son with brains and wit to a big, powerful, plunging dragoon with neither."

Johnnie's susceptible vanity was tickled by the pleasant flattery: but, nevertheless, he was about to reply in deprecating fashion to the Rector's implied praise, when a joyous shout,

from childish lungs, feminine and musical, caused the two men to look in the direction whence it proceeded.

"My ward, my little Bessie! You have scarcely seen her, Johnnie, since she and her nurse came, a month ago, to enliven this dull parsonage." And even as he spoke, a child—a small fairy, clad in silk and velvet—came towards him, and flung herself impetuously into his arms.

"Oh, Guardie, dear!" she cried, "Sarah won't let me touch the flowers. Say I may: they're so much bigger than the daisies in the wood."

"A great deal bigger, child," responded the Rector; "and Sarah is silly not to teach you to like big things best."

He put a purple Dahlia, large as a saucer, into her hands, as he spoke.

The child screamed with delight.

"Oh, please Guardie, one more—a golden one!" she cried.

"Well, one for Sarah, then; Sarah is fond of gold. Tell her to put this bright one in her cap, and say that fairies in its cells will pull the merry bells, and shower pretty roses in her lap."

The little girl looked up in his face with a puzzled expression, for she had not as yet grown accustomed to a playful way he had of clothing

his passing thoughts in doggerel rhyme. She bounded away, however, with her treasures, and Mr. Fendall saw her, when, a few minutes later he passed through the entrance hall, busily assisting Sarah, who was a handsome showy woman of some thirty years of age, in the agreeable task of placing Mr. Santland's gorgeous flower in her dark and glossy hair.

CHAPTER VI.

JOHNNIE HAS MISGIVINGS.

“How happy he is!” said Johnnie, as he strolled homewards; “and how attached, notwithstanding his remark on the unexciting monotony of our life, to the Rectory he has made so classically pretty, and to the garden, which is the most perfect thing of the kind that is to be seen for miles around. How he must hate me, too, when he reflects that, in five or six years, I, a man so much his junior, and so infinitely his inferior in wisdom and acquirements, shall appear in my suit of solemn black, and turn him from the home which he has made so loveable! And then, that girl—the child he calls his ward, whose youth will from henceforth be spent with him in a spot which will be endeared to her by many a by-gone pleasure—how hard, how very hard she then will deem it to be forced away from all her childhood’s haunts, and see another take possession of all the

goodly scenes that she has learnt to prize ! She will feel as—as I do, in knowing that I have no right in Hazel Combe—no interest in the lovely beech woods where I used to go bird-nesting when a boy—no claim upon the respect and love of tenants who have lived four generations on my father's land, and who, from the very moment when *his* head shall be resting in the grave, will turn to Matthew as to their ruler, counsellor, and friend ! ”

It must not be thought, from these specimens of poor Johnnie Fendall's inward cogitations, that he had been provided by nature with a blacker or more envious heart than that which beats in the breast of most of Adam's children ; and that he is, therefore, unworthy of interest and affection. Did we all possess a novelist's privilege to look into the secret places of our neighbours' inner selves, I doubt whether we should often find therein *much* better stuff than that which we must all acknowledge we are ourselves composed of ; and, therefore, it behoves us to be merciful, and to attend to the excuses which can be urged in favour of this apparently more than usually dissatisfied specimen of our common nature.

Sir Matthew's younger son, then, was (anoma-

lous as the remark may seem) both older and younger than his years. To account for this peculiarity it is only necessary to mention, that for the last four years of his life he had lived principally with grave and silent companions, and that thought, serious and constant, had, since the age of fifteen (when a dangerous illness prevented his return to Eton), filled up the time which is usually spent by young lads of his age in recreation and congenial society. The consequence of this unadvisable, and, in his case, even mischievous state of existence was a morbid and unhealthy dwelling on himself, his motives for present action, and his prospects and duties for the future. Had such studies been alternated with lively conversation, healthy bodily exercise, and a general pleasant mingling with those of his own degree and age, it is probable that Johnnie's views of life would have been saner, and his mind in a better frame for the reception of those fresh ideas which are produced rather late in life, when at the age of nineteen very few "first impressions" have yet been imbibed.

The two brothers had, in early boyhood, been inseparable companions. They were mutually attached, too, in as great a degree as is usually

the case with schoolboys ; for, thanks to the solid materials either of his head or heart, the elder had never shown himself jealous of the preference which their father, albeit unknown to himself, manifested for his youngest born.

But after the long and memorable illness which transformed Johnnie for a time into a moping invalid, everything at Hazel Combe seemed changed, for the boy's melancholy re-acted on Sir Matthew's spirits ; and Mat, the "capital fellow," as he was called, having no taste for what he denominated "dismals," was seldom at the Combe. Invitations were showered thick and fast upon the elder son, and in the enjoyment of health and good spirits, joined to pleasant flatteries, Matthew passed his time away.

A tutor at home, the predecessor of Mr. Santland in the important office of preparing Johnnie's mind for his sacred vocation, had not tended greatly to the enlivenment of the family circle.

He might justly be called an excellent man, conscientious in the discharge of his duties, and greatly attached to his pupil. But he was of a gloomy and Calvinistic turn of mind, and given to the expounding of some of our religious

articles of faith in a manner which, whilst it was anything but candid, raised doubts in Johnnie's mind tending to unfit him for the profession he was expected to adopt.

When Mr. Polwarth bade adieu to the lad who was then about to be transferred to the superior teaching of the rector of Combe Hatton, Johnnie was overcome with sorrow.

"How dreadfully I shall miss you," he said; "for no one else understands me. No one seems to feel how terrible it is to awake every morning with a weight upon the heart; and with the one ever-present idea, that we have all only come into the world to die."

"Death is the great event of life," responded the tutor, sententiously.

"What a fearful and depressing thought, especially for one who, like me, is excluded by ill-health, and by—by—by—— I mean that I am so different from others; so—— Ah, Mr. Polwarth, is it, can it be, the will of what we are told is a merciful Providence, that a man should be born into the world only to be miserable? Surely it cannot be the purpose of an omniscient Deity that a creature who would gladly serve Him with all his energies of mind and body, should be debarred, even as I am, from

the power of fulfilling, well and actively, the daily duties of life? And then comes the terrible possibility of rejection for ever; and I ask you, even as I ask myself, wherefore was I born, and for what cause came I into the world?"

This was a question which, as may be readily supposed, Mr. Polwarth found it hard to answer. He felt sorry, too, at the moment, for the unhappy lad on whose sensitive mind his own gloomy tenets had had such injurious effect; but he was not a deep searcher into causes, and therefore failed to see, in the exaggerated terms used by the agitated boy, a proof that the first workings of aspiring feelings, born of coming manhood, were poured forth as in a resistless stream.

"My poor fellow!" he said, commiseratingly; and at that moment pity was the last offering which it was advisable to present to that eager questioner—"My poor boy, I grieve to see that the quiet and safe monotony of your life at Hazel Combe has failed to preserve you from a restlessness which I fear is fraught with danger to your future well-being. Sickness and mortification have, as you say, been hitherto your lot on earth; and it may be that your past has till now been but a beginning of sorrows, a pre-

taste only of the future chastisements which are to render you a fitting recipient of the joys which are prepared in heaven for those that are elected from the beginning."

Poor Johnnie shuddered visibly under the words of his Calvinistic friend. The possible happiness of a future state of being had, in the poor boy's mind, been rendered so very problematical, and so little dependent on his own exertions, that a heavy sigh, as Mr. Polwarth stretched forth his hand to bid him farewell, was his only and natural response to the latter's well-meant exordium.

"Cheer up, my boy," said his departing friend—who, as I have said, was touched by the deep despondency visible in his quondam pupil's face—"Cheer up, and learn to trust in all the faithful promises, believing that you can do nothing of or for yourself, and that faith alone can save your soul from eternal perdition. Cheer up, and hope that we may meet again, for I shall come some day and look in upon you at the *old place*" (meaning the grand old university, in which, as a sizar at a small college, he had fitted himself for holy orders). "Yes, I shall come and look in upon you at the old place, and trust that I shall find you with your loins

girt up, and banner unfurled, taking no heed to the perilous doctrines and devices of those who would subvert the simple truths of our most holy faith, nor looking for reward and consolation to your fellow-men, however high their rank may be, and how great soever may be the consideration they enjoy."

And with this parting advice the tutor of "extreme views" went on his way, leaving the mind of the youth whose education he had undertaken to form in as wavering and unhealthy a state, as ever yet caused parents and guardians to dread that arch-enemy of their youthful charges—videlicet, a truant and over-excitable imagination.

CHAPTER VII.

JOHNNIE FENDALL AT OXFORD.

A MONTH after the departure of the younger son, Mr. Santland paid a visit to the Combe, and requested an interview with Lady Fendall. Sir Matthew's aged mother received him in her private sitting-room,—a severe-looking apartment, in which no modern luxury had ventured to insinuate itself, for its venerable occupant regarded easy chairs as snares of evil to the young, encouragers to the vice of idleness, and incentives to the passing away in sleep of some of those shining hours which Providence has given us to improve.

On the present occasion she was seated on a piece of furniture called by our grandmothers a *settee*—her form erect, and with a handkerchief of the finest cambric crossed upon her breast. On her head there was a tall fabric of a cap, composed of costly lace, and of a

ribbon grey in colour, and known in ancient days as bearing the name of "Love."

"Any news of the traveller?" asked Mr. Santland, after shaking hands with the ancient lady, whose strong common sense he greatly respected, and whose grasp was still vigorous, dry and withered as were the fingers which he held in his.

"A few lines, received this morning, and I am sorry to say that Johnnie has had a return of his unpleasant complaint, that lowering sickness that has hung about him so long. I don't know, really, Mr. Santland, what has come over the young people in these days. In my time we never heard of these nervous maladies, these dyspepsias, and faldadiddles—in my time there was no such thing as old young men, but——"

"But there were young old ladies, even then," smiled agreeable Mr. Santland; and Lady Fendall, though her powers of blushing had passed away with age, responded to the pleasant look which accompanied the words, showing thereby two rows of teeth, which in her vigorous old womanhood she yet retained, as proof of her excellent and untried constitution.

"In my opinion," continued the Rector, "my friend Johnnie has been crossed in love."

"In love—nonsense! What can he know of love?"

"Not much of its practice, and of its theory scarcely more. There was Miss Lillias Sutton——"

"Little Lillias—how very absurd!"

"All the more probable. Johnnie had some indistinct notions—at least, I fancy so—that there exists such a thing out of a fairy tale as disinterested attachment: so—but I believe that idleness had a good deal to do with the business—he walked and talked through all last summer with the little maiden, who found it pleasant pastime, till the young soldier came and cut poor Johnnie out. That's all—only the old story—women's vows are traced in sand."

"One foot on sea, and one on land," quoted the old lady, proud of her memory, and glad to show the extent of her erudition to the learned Mr. Santland.

"Really! Well, that is a singular situation for a young lady! Fancy little Lillias, with her pretty satined feet in so false a position! It is nothing of course for a bold dragoon, like Master Matthew—quite a normal affair, in short. But, my dear madam, I am forgetting the purport of my visit, namely, that I am going to Oxford in

a day or two, and shall be glad to carry any message or letter" (the cost of letters was a consideration in those days) "to your grandson. I have a friend, too, a medical man, whose advice would, I am sure, be of service to him, and ——"

"I have no opinion of medical men," interrupted the uncompromising old lady."

"Well, but the one I speak of is not only remarkable for professional skill, but might take out his diploma any day as an M.D. for the mind. He will feel a paternal interest in your grandson; indeed, my friend Shirly is one whom the most anxious parent might intrust with her dearest treasure."

"Shirly!" repeated Lady Fendall. "Any relation of Professor Shirly's?"

"His son."

"Indeed! The professor dined with us—I recollect the occasion well, for we had the Westerhams to meet them)—fifty—no, not fifty—nine-and-forty years ago. Forty-nine years ago this last September," remarked Sir Matthew's mother, whose recollection of events which had occurred during the last century was very vivid.

"Did he?" rejoined the rector, gravely. "Well, that is the kind of obligation which rests on a man's mind, and I have no doubt

that, being an hereditary one, my friend will be anxious to acquit himself of it. And now, dear madam, I must wish you good-by, for though my absence will be short, I am overwhelmed with parish business, which must be attended to before my departure."

"And the garden, and little Bessie?"

"Will do very well without me. Old Dame Hickson will miss me perhaps, but I have taught Bessie to thread her needles. Poor old soul, she grows blinder every day; yesterday I found her with an implement of housewifery, in the shape of a great round-eyed needle—a needle which she declared a rich man could get through—and it was as impossible to push her thread from one side to the other as if it had been a cable."

He laughed pleasantly as he left the room, and even before the door had closed upon him, Lady Fendall, as she thought of his amusing, cheering talk, his frequent visits, and his almost unvarying good spirits, could not prevent the passing reflection that even her attentive Johnnie, amiable and excellent as he was, would be a poor substitute for the agreeable and—towards her—ever considerate Mr. Santland.

In the meantime the object of his grand-

mother's slightly disparaging mental observations was feeling desolate enough in the lonely lodging, where, feeble, flushed, and nervous, he was beginning to appreciate more rightly than he had done before, the once despised blessings of home. He had no friends at Oxford ; no one single being who was likely to drop in, and break the spell of gloomy reverie which was engendered by his solitude. So there he lay, stretched on a black horsehair sofa, the best the house afforded, and watching the feeble light which the street-lamp sent flickering through the small unhomelike room. An indescribable and unwonted yearning for human companionship stole over him, as the minutes lengthened into hours—a yearning that was almost a pain.

“If only,” he mentally ejaculated,—“if only that cross, scheming-looking landlady, or her shining-faced maid-of-all-work, would look in, and ask if I am in want of anything, it would be almost a comfort ; if only my wretched eyes felt strong enough to read ; if only”—but this inward inspiration was spoken in the faintest whisper—“if only I were at home with dear old grannie and——”

But at this moment the door opened, and although it was almost too dark to discern the

features of the intruder, his voice proclaimed at once that he was no other than Mr. Santland.

"So," he said, after the first greetings were over, "I have come before you are half-settled. But, never mind, these horrid kind of places are not new to me. I knew Mrs. So-and-so by heart, and the husband too, who is never seen in the flesh, but whose authority is for ever being evoked whenever the worthy landlady is anxious to demonstrate that she is by no means an unprotected female. Oh, yes, I know them well, and the way they tyrannise over a wretched freshman who is not up to their intrigues?"

"I dare say they do," began Johnnie, languidly.

"Daresay? Why, you know they do. You have discovered already that there is no key to the cupboard, and no lock to the tea-chest, and that the young woman below has a "follower," who drinks your wine, and will wear your clothes when he grows familiar! And now, after this exordium, let's have a light, and see how you are looking."

Saying which, and without waiting for permission, the Rector pulled at a piece of dirty

red cord, which dangled near the mantelpiece.

"How kind of you to come and see me," said Johnnie; "for you know I have not a single friend or acquaintance here yet; and—and—altogether, I believe I expected something rather different."

"Of course you did; nothing is like what our imaginations have previously painted it; and for my part, I doubt whether anything quite new, whether it be music, a friend, a shoe, or even an idea, is ever thoroughly pleasant till after the gloss of novelty has worn off. Put the lights on the other table," he continued, addressing the red-armed servant-maid, who, after a noisy opening of the door, entered with a pair of tallow candles, ensconced in ill-plated candlesticks.

She had closed the door behind her by a method more ingenious than graceful, and was proceeding to place the candles on a table between the gentlemen, when Santland, addressing her in his quaint semi-serious manner, said, in a tone of grave advice—

"Hebe, my dear, that action of yours proves to me that you have sadly neglected the classic beauties of statuesque art."

"Lor, sir!" began Hebe, who, though well-accustomed to undergraduate chaff, was sorely puzzled by Santland's remark.

"I will take you some day to see the enchanting cupbearer, with her lovely limb extended, and then you will better know how, with beauteous ankle bended, to shut a freshman's door. There, remember what I have been saying to you, and bring the snuffers. Johnnie, my poor fellow," he continued, turning affectionately to the boy after the departure of his mystical auditress, "you can't stand the light, I see, wretched as it is" (for the object of his sympathy was shading his throbbing eyelids with his hand); "you have got inflammation, or some miserable thing, and ought to see the doctor."

"I hate doctors: they never do me any good: and indeed I fear that illness and I are too old associates to be parted now. Look here," he added, pointing to a row of bottles on a shelf, "you see there some of the habitual companions of my lonely hours, cheerful reminders are they not?"

"Very; but come, it seems to me that you have never gone the right way to work with yourself, and if you will only let me and an old

friend of mine take you in hand, I think we may hit upon something better for you than this incessant dwelling upon the leaden memory of the past, this atmosphere of physic-bottles and pill-boxes, which are for ever engendering images of death and the grave. You are too young for this kind of thing, Fendall, fifty years too young; why, when I was twenty——”

“You were of course very different from a poor wretch like me. But do you know, Mr. Santland, that the idea sometimes occurs to me, that if I could be really religious, I should be more cheerful?”

“But, perhaps,” rejoined Santland, seriously, “if you were really cheerful, you would not care to be religious. My experience of life tells me that when people have everything they want,—those, too, especially, whose temperaments naturally incline them to look on the bright side of things—they are not given to trouble themselves much about another world. Women do, and fellows who have been brought up to it, and who have had religious mothers, and all that kind of thing; but take my word for it, that it is a dismal life here below which causes a man to turn over in his mind that he may possibly be a less miserable man in another state of existence.

And now I'll tell you all about my journey, and about little Lillias, who was in the coach with her maid for ten miles from Hillingstone."

"And did she——" began the blushing Johnnie, with all a boy's awkwardness and hesitation.

"Did she? of course she did. Spoke of no one and nothing else for an hour and more. Certainly," he added, "she is a pretty creature," and then in a low voice he improvised, in his rich musical voice, the following panegyric on the absent idol of Johnnie's juvenile affection:—

"Oh, a lovely thing is the lily flower,
That blooms in the hazel grove;
From the soft fresh leaves of her fragrant bower
She lures us on to love.
Can lovely lilies be bought and sold—
Their favour be lost and won—
Their petals be watered with showers of gold
And opened out to the sun?"

"Can?—But of course they can," he said, interrupting himself, and breaking off suddenly into matter-of-fact prose; while Johnnie, bewildered and fascinated, continued listening through the earlier hours of the night to his companion's enlivening and often dangerously exciting conversation, which led him insensibly onward to brighter, though, alas! not to better or more Christianlike aspirations.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONSULTATION.

MR. SANTLAND did not find much difficulty in persuading Johnnie to be introduced more as a friend than as a patient to the intelligent earnest man, whose name as a philosopher stood even higher in the world's estimation, than his character as a skilful healer of the body's ailments. They had been schoolfellows and play-mates in boyhood, those two men of such widely different temperaments, the choice of whose professions had been decided more by chance and by necessity, than by their own inclinations. A slight personal deformity—very slight indeed, but still sufficiently perceptible to preclude his entrance either into the Army or the Church—had limited the list of “callings” in which young Shirly might hope to earn a livelihood, and rise eventually to distinction.

His father, who was the professor of an Oxford college, was a poor, nay even an embar-

raised man, for his family was large and increasing; but, needy as he might in truth be deemed, he indulged in the mighty extravagance of ambition—an extravagance unpardonable in a needy man: but then his son Jasper was so richly endowed with mental gifts—so capable, at least such was his father's opinion, of raising up a name and a fortune for himself and for his family—that the struggling parents resolved to make all possible sacrifices for the advancement of their eldest born.

“You are wrong,” said a more worldly-wise friend (one who had fought, with desperate odds against him, the hard battle of life, and found himself at evening-time without resources, arms, or ammunition), “you are wrong—ambition is one of the many superfluities of the rich and happy. You will do well to accept for Jasper the appointment which you say Lord B—— has offered him, and be thankful that of your dozen children one at least is provided with the means of existence.”

“The *means* of existence!” repeated Shirly. “And to what end, I ask you? To live as thousands of intelligent human beings are compelled to do, in the capacity of copying machines, moved and worked (*over-worked* often) by those

who, though socially their superiors, are probably their inferiors both in talents and acquirements. And the end of all this is, to say the least of it, worthy of the beginning, and of the tedious time which follows after; for of what avail to them are either their talents or their industry, when all is mere matter of routine, and when the dullest is on a par with the most intellectual? To me it would be a melancholy reflection, that my son was removed from all chance of individual distinction, and that in his latter days he would sink into a toil-worn pensioner, in receipt of a wretched pittance begrudged him by the public he had served."

"But he will be off your hands at any rate: he will be——"

"I don't want him to be what you call 'off my hands,'" broke in Shirly, impatiently. "I wish my son to lead a life, and pursue a course of study, which will open his mind, enlarge his views, and——"

"Enable him at forty to marry his mistress or his washerwoman—for that is what those world-ignorant students are in the habit of doing; whereas, a life in London will bring him in contact with the friends of men in power—men who might help him on in life, and——"

“ Ah! I see; but Jasper would never be the parasite of a parasite. There is a native independence in his character, which will help him to lay the foundation of his own fortunes, and the time will I trust come, when even you will confess that I have done wisely for my son in encouraging his taste for study and for mental improvement.”

It was a bold measure in the father of twelve children, that of refusing the well-meant offer of a Minister, in whose protection many a young man might have seen the means of rising in the world. It was a bold measure, but it only partially succeeded; for, though Jasper made himself a reputation in the scientific and literary world, fortune did not flow in at the opening to distinction which the *poor* young man had made for himself. As a physician (for he had early made up his mind that, as a profession, his choice lay between *that* of medicine and the far dryer study of the law) he had seen much of human nature, both in its best and its least attractive forms; and perhaps a natural tendency to look indulgently on the errors and weaknesses of his fellow-beings, had been fostered and encouraged by the curious studies of individual character to which the habits of his life had introduced him.

Be this as it may, it is certain that for the purpose of strengthening (as far as such an end could be attained by human means) the mental and bodily constitution of poor Johnnie Fendall, a more fitting instrument could scarcely be found than Mr. Santland's eccentric, but eminently experienced, friend.

"And now tell me what you think of him?" was Santland's question, after several lengthened interviews had taken place between the physician and his new patient.

"Think of him? Why that there is every reason to expect that the day will come when we shall see him as strong as you or I. He has no organic disease—an irritable constitution, certainly—all over irritation. One day his pulse is racing through him with the rapidity of a steam engine, and the next—no life—used up—and ready to hang himself."

"But when is he to get better? You understand the symptoms; but can you suggest no remedy—no course of life likely to lead to improvement?"

"The remedy is in nature's hands," said the doctor; "and the best advice I can give this young fellow is, that he should give up his case to her care. The boy has been positively exist-

ing, as far as I can learn, on drugs, and on his own morbid thoughts and fancies. Then he has no sisters—no mother. I have great faith in a mother,” added Dr. Shirly, musingly.

“But again I ask, what is to be done? And do you expect that nature, who has apparently overlooked this poor lad hitherto, will return to her duties after all these years?”

“Certainty she will, if she is not interfered with. But Dame Nature is a doctress who, like myself, is very jealous of other practitioners. Young Fendall must lead a busier, and therefore a more natural life; and you will soon perceive a change in him. Why, man, the sap *must* rise—the flowers *must* bloom. Nip them off if you will in the early spring, and they’ll out again in summer or in autumn. What this boy wants is a changed atmosphere to breathe in, wholesome thoughts to dwell upon, and cheerful, strong companions to associate with. Besides, he wants to grow.”

“Grow! Why he is nineteen at least.”

“Possibly—but he’s a very child for all that. Bodily growth is a very slow process in some cases, especially where the brain is a busy one. Look at nature, and ask yourself whether amongst the forest timber trees those are not the

most valuable which take their time in arriving at perfection, and increase in strength as their topmost boughs are gradually rising upwards. I have kept my eyes about me, Santland, and have, as a rule, a poor opinion even of the mental constitution of lads who spring up into lathy length at once ; for in proportion as their bodily growth has been rapid, so has their moral and inward man been wanting in vitality and vigour. I have no opinion, I repeat, as a rule, of your great overgrown fellows," added the doctor, complacently—for he was a small man himself, and certainly ran no danger of being classed among those of whom he had spoken so disparagingly.

"But," urged Santland, "you must allow there are exceptions to your rule. Think of —— and ——" he said, mentioning two well-known characters, whose intellects were certainly not out of proportion to their inches.

"To say nothing of the Rector of Combe Hatton," rejoined the doctor, smiling. "I agree that there are instances extant, where nature has been liberal enough to bestow an organisation so vigorous, that the rights of the physical have not encroached upon those of the intellectual man. But, whilst looking out for further exam-

ples of my rule, do not forget to note, a year hence, the inch or so (for it may not be more) which young Fendall will have then added to his stature. I shall see him sometimes—not as a physician, but as a friend, and as the offerer of advice which probably, like strengthening medicines, he will soon feel too able-bodied and strong-minded to take. By-the-by, he tells me that you have put him in the way of mixing occasionally in society ; and he mentioned, amongst others, L—— and D——, as two of those who would, at your recommendation, take our tyro by the hand. Is this so, or did the boy deceive himself? I almost hope he did, for the mental food they would place before him is rather strong, and——”

“But he is not quite a babe, to be fed with milk,” broke in his companion, who seemed rather over-anxious to justify himself. “Besides, you said just now that what he wanted most was change.”

“But there is change and change,” said the doctor gravely, as he went on his way.

“Ay, even as there is chance and chance,” muttered the Rector to himself, when his old friend had left him. “And after all, Johnnie Fendall may never be Rector of Combe Hatton.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE RECTOR'S WARD.

TEN years, all but a few short months, have been added to the world's age since the events which I have recorded in the preceding chapter : but they are years which have produced no violent or startling changes in the family whose history, as I would fain hope, is beginning to excite some slight degree of interest in the reader of these pages. For the stream of life, whose sluggishness once told so heavily on the spirits of the younger son, has scarcely run more swiftly since the time when he had querulously complained of the sameness of his existence : nay, it would almost seem (with such tranquillity did that peaceful river pursue its onward flow) as though the small but swiftly running rivulets, fed by the violence of human passions, and swollen by their crimes, had never mixed their turbid waters with the placid current which the old people at the Combe denominated life !

Old people! Yes, for Time has not spared the now more than middle-aged man whose hair is thickly strewn with grey; while it would almost seem as if death had passed by, and utterly forgotten, the ancient lady who in the winter of her age is still erect and vigorous—a living proof, as she would often remark, of the difference between those of “her day,” and the present denizens of this “working day” world.

It is early spring, and the season is beginning to put forth all its beauties: for a thousand hues are already decking the miniature forests by which the “down” country, where stands the venerable mansion of Hazel Combe, is so beautifully adorned. Already is the pale tender green feathering the branchlets of the graceful larches, whose pink tassels make pretty contrast with the delicate verdure: while the spreading beeches, clothed with a darker shading, and with rustling leaves, the remnants of the past year’s splendour, are throwing out their opening buds to the glad welcome of the warm April sun.

All nature seemed astir. Astir in the throats of the loving birds who carolled to their mates right joyously. Astir in the fluttering white-winged butterfly, as it closed its light wings on the petals of the dew-washed flower; and

in the active noisy bee, which murmured so cheerful an accompaniment to its daily task, as it nestled in the harebell's tender bosom.

"How beautiful the country and the woods are looking! Guardie, dear, come out with me and bask in the bright sunshine. It might be winter here with all these musty books—and it is such a summer out of doors."

"Summer in April; foolish child! See what it is to hope! Bessie, my pet, you are like the swallow—the one swallow that skims along the lake and wets its bright wings with the dew upon the meadows—but you cannot make a summer. No, even my Bessie cannot make a summer."

He gazed earnestly at the handsome, happy girl, who had ventured into his solemn looking study in hopes to lure him into the presence of the garish sun: and whilst he is fixing his eyes half admiringly and half inquiringly upon her face, we will describe the object of the Rector's (for Mr. Santland is the occupier of that pretty parsonage) anxious scrutiny.

Bessie Forester, who was now seventeen, and whose young life had been passed almost entirely in the Rectory of Combe Hatton, came decidedly under the denomination of a "fine girl." She

had fine eyes, fine features, rather on a large scale, a fine figure, and, what is of course far preferable (on the old principle, that it is better to be good than pretty), a fine disposition. She was always in good humour, always ready to be pleased, taking an interest in the little daily nothings which she counted as events; and looking for no greater pleasures than those which by the fine ladies—of whose very existence the country girl was ignorant—would probably have been considered childish and ridiculous in the extreme.

Mr. Santland scarcely looked a day older than when, in the highly-appreciated capacity of family friend and adviser, he followed Johnnie Fendall to Christ Church, and there instructed him in the way that he should go. He was now fifty years old; but for any signs of age or care, or any wrinkles that could be traced along the broad high forehead, he might have scarcely passed man's grand climacteric, or have attained the apex of that hill down which the wheels of Time run every moment swifter the nearer they approach that dismal valley—the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where the driving clouds of Destiny strive to shut out the rainbow hues of Hope.

At the moment when we see this able man again, he is questioning his ward concerning her morning walk—a walk which had led her, as it often did, to Hazel Combe, where Lady Fendall, aged as she was, looked daily for the presence of the lively girl, whose visits were as rays of sunshine shed on her decaying powers.

“And the Colonel?” he asked—“how about the handsome Colonel, the soldier tired of war’s alarms? A pretty line, but an unpopular fallacy; for what respectable soldier was ever yet known to feel either fatigue or fear?”

Bessie laughed merrily.

“Not Sir Matthew’s monster son, I should imagine, dear Guardie, for he is twice the size of Mr. Fendall,” and she was about to add, “twice as stupid,” but a prompting of maidenly bashfulness checked the invidious comparison ere it had passed her lips.

“Times are changed with you, my pet,” said Mr. Santland, as he followed the girl into the garden. “Do you remember the day when you begged for larger, showier flowers, because, forsooth, the daisies of the field were so small that they were beneath my little Bessie’s notice?”

“I have grown wiser since those days.”

“Wiser? Does added wisdom necessarily

come, my child, with lengthened days? Think you that the lad Johnnie—the fair-haired boy—his father's favourite, is wiser now, since he has tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, than when he walked with us in this garden, as sinless almost as a simple child?"

"Where is Johnnie Fendall now?" asked Bessie, timidly.

"In America, I believe, my dear—in New Orleans, when last they heard of him. A restless, troubled spirit he is, unstable as water, excelling in nothing, admiring nothing, and, as I greatly fear, believing in nothing."

"Oh! Guardie, you do not mean that? You do not think in your heart that Johnnie—that Mr. Fendall is—is——"

"Is what? Child, do not talk of what you do not understand, or ask questions which cannot be answered. Mind your needles and your ribbons, and think about the pretty dress which Sir Matthew has given you for the ball—the ball, my dear, where you will flirt with Colonel Fendall, but all beneath the rose; for he has rings upon his fingers, and belles are at his toes. And you'll simper through a country dance with Curate Fortescue, and think it all delightful because it's something new."

“Oh! Guardie, how foolish you are!” exclaimed his ward, laughing and blushing prettily; “but whatever you may say, and however much you may watch me, I shall enjoy the ball thoroughly; and if Colonel Fendall asks me to dance——”

“You will make him your lowest curtsey, and thank him very much, because he will be a baronet, with a handle to his name; and hasn’t done his harm by stealth, nor blushed to find it fame. But, by the way, Bessie (but that, of course, you know nothing about—young ladies never do discover anything for themselves), what do you think of the boy? A pretty little fellow, is he not?”

“Yes, pretty, I daresay; but he is so very fair, and soft-looking, and I don’t like his eyes.”

“Don’t you, child? Ten years hence, when you are grown up——”

“Grown up! Ten years hence I shall be an old woman!”

“Well, then, when you are an old woman, you will do what every wise old woman is expected to do: that is to say, you will fall in love with a boy, and that boy will be Master Myles Fendall, with his sallow cheeks and big blue eyes.”

"Never. He has a bad face—a bad, cruel, cunning face: he is like no Fendall that I ever saw—unlike his father, and as for Johnnie——"

"Johnnie! Never mind about that truant fellow, Bessie. He has forgotten all his friends. He never writes, never thinks of us poor stay-at-homes. He has a yellow wife, I warrant you, over there in the Slave States, where marriage is of 'too little worth to be dealt with by attorneyship.' And now, child, go and sew another bow of ribbon on your frock, and braid your dark hair at the glass, and smile at your own image; wondering which is prettiest, a red rose or a white to place upon your breast."

She was looking graver now, far graver, and more thoughtful, a gravity to be accounted for by something that her guardian had let fall—his hints about the absent one, perhaps, or it might be by his sarcastic nonsense; but she was used to that; and though it sometimes puzzled him, she was not often wounded by his teazings. What was it, then, which sent her with slow step and thoughtful brow to look once more at the white gossamer dress, adorned with its pure pale lilies, which lay upon the maiden's couch, all ready to make still more lovely the loveliness of her sweet seventeen summers? An hour before, and no

heart in all the country side was lighter than the one which beat in the young breast of Bessie Forester; and now——Ah! he was scarcely one, that learned classic, to have charge of the frail brittle thing, a maiden's heart! And yet he loved her dearly——would have schemed and plotted——ay, he had schemed and plotted for her happiness. But all had gone against him——all his well-laid projects (for he had deemed them such) had hitherto been thwarted by capricious Fortune; and the bright toy which he and that relentless dame had flung about between them, might——and, indeed, he begun at last to see the danger——be bruised and wounded hopelessly, before the dangerous sport in which her part had been so purely passive could be half played out.

CHAPTER X.

THE COLONEL AND THE COUNTY.

“How fortunate it is that Colonel Fendall left India in time for our ball! I declare he will be quite an ornament, and we never have too many men at any time.”

The utterer of this piece of self-congratulation was Mrs. Western, who now, with her husband and children, enjoyed the rather empty honour of occupying Westerham Abbey. It was an imposing and a lordly abode, as I have before hinted, but as the earl, Sir Matthew's brother-in-law, considered a residence in Paris as more conducive to the keeping up in their rightful order of his hereditary stock of good spirits, he generously permitted his needy younger brother to endure on a limited income the unbearable dullness, as he considered it, of the paternal hall, and allowed him the doubtful privilege of keeping in order the estate which

his lordship's natural indolence led him so entirely to neglect.

Mrs. Western was a woman who had once been handsome, and who, whilst she retained the memory of the fact, could with difficulty persuade herself to remember that she had seen her five-and-fortieth autumn. Nor could she be induced to believe, notwithstanding the living presence of daughters past their twentieth year, that Old Time would ever venture to take liberties with one who presented so bold a front to the enemy.

At the moment when this spirited lady was congratulating herself and society on the expected presence at her coming entertainment of Sir Matthew's handsome son, her hands, as well as her woman's heart and soul, were occupied in preparations for that important event. She was one of those female heads of families who always deem it their duty to "look" to everything themselves; so, at the present juncture, having taken the work out of the hands of the much-affronted young lady's-maid, she had surrounded herself with crimson roses, and pink calico, green paper leaves, and *brimborions* of all descriptions and dimensions, till the old drawing-room, with its fifty-years-old Turkey

carpet, and its equally time-worn looking curtains, bore very much the appearance of a decorating-room at a country theatre, with the "property" manager superintending the arrangements for the "representation" of the night.

Mr. Richard Western (the husband of this busy lady), who was a man of inactive habits, and much given to sedentary pursuits, had, on the morning of which I write, stretched himself comfortably in an arm-chair, and was pretending to enjoy the dignified dullness of the heaviest article in the last "Quarterly Review."

He had been in Parliament during one long session, and that at a period when it would seem that his talent for silence—solemn and eloquent—was at a premium. Possibly, also, Mr. Western's unvarying yielding to the opinions of his party, and the influence of his brother as regarded the votes of his county, had something to do with the advancement in political life of that county's member; and then, too, it might be urged that places of importance were more numerous at that crisis than there were fitting persons to put into them; but, however this may be, certain it is that Mr. Western, greatly to his own surprise, and not a little to that of

the nation, was recognised as a useful man, sworn as a privy councillor, and given one of the least responsible and difficult of the offices which a salaried M.P. can fill. It was not long that he held his post, but, short as it was, the time was sufficient to unhinge the minds of his family for ever.

For three months, being in the receipt of so large an income that to the newly-made Right Honourable it seemed inexhaustible, the affectionate paterfamilias permitted himself the luxurious superfluity of his wife's society, and the presence in London of his elder olive-branches; and thus it was that the two presented and presentable Miss Westerns were enabled to show their country faces at balls and dinners, operas and public shows, while for three short months their great relations ceased to treat them as indigent connections; and the poor girls, deceived by appearances, and imagining that their greatness would endure for ever, waxed impertinent in their turn, and looked sneeringly on the humbler friends who had been true to them in their obscurity.

"Unsavoury are the uses of prosperity," was Santland's reply to Johnnie Fendall when, after a short visit to London, during his cousin's tem-

porary importance, the younger son complained to the recluse of the airs which the newly-exalted family indulged in. "Those who feel such cuts should keep from the great Babel till their skins are thicker. I would far rather look at the world's battle from my loop-hole, and shoot out little arrows, if it so pleased me, from under my safe cover, than go into the *mélée*, and come out as you have done, with my weak part sore and wounded."

It was soon after this advice had been offered by the Rector, that Johnnie, who had of late years shown a wandering and truant disposition, took his passage in a sailing vessel for America. He had now been more than two years journeying about that vast continent, and the letters received from him, which had never been frequent, had, for several months past, become still more rare, and therefore more anxiously watched for.

The Government which had chosen Richard Western as one of the State's pillars, remained in power only the limited period which had sufficed to fill with discontent and unavailing regret the minds of the disappointed young ladies, whose visions of future glory were thus effectually doomed. The Party—"papa's Party,"

as his daughters called it—had been “in” more than once since the day when Mr. Western had been a minister of state: but never since that memorable occasion had place and power been offered to the apparently forgotten man. So the privy councillor was fain to retire upon his laurels—a narrow bed enough, as Mr. Santland was heard to remark, whilst Barbara and Janetta (the younger was called Janetta, after the lamented Lady Fendall) were carried back with unwilling minds to Westerham, where they still continued to dwell pertinaciously upon their departed pleasures, and to aim at exciting the envy of their few acquaintances by a description of the wonders of their short campaign.

But perhaps the most unfortunate result which had followed on that meteor-like flash of prosperity was the conviction which it had left on Mrs. Western’s mind, that she was not only a beauty, but a *bel esprit*. That a woman could be the wife of a public man and *not* be a *maitresse femme*, one capable of assisting in a political cabal, and of influencing by her talents the fate of nations, was an idea which had never for a moment occurred to her. Impressed, therefore, with this flattering belief, she plunged at once into the full spirit of her part, playing it with a

vigour and *verve* astounding to those around her, and never shrinking from what she called the arduous and fatiguing duties which her exalted political position entailed upon her.

But it is time to return to the actual presence of this little-comprehended lady, who has been kept too long in a fatiguing position, with a hot-house rose-bud in her hand, whilst we have been occupied in sketching her portrait.

"You have been to Hazel Combe, of course, Mr. Western, to call on Colonel Fendall?" she asked.

"Not I—I don't stand on ceremony with my own cousins; and if Mat wishes to see us, he must come here. Besides, you have asked him to the ball, and that will do for the present."

"Mr. Western! Richard! you surprise me!" was his wife's rejoinder. "Here is Dick ready for the county—twenty-one last February, and you are neglecting your political influence, and forgetting that it is our duty to stand by our party——"

"Stand by a fiddlestick!" interrupted her husband, rather crossly; for, if the truth must be told, he was a little sore on the subject of his country's ingratitude towards himself.

"Really, Mr. Western, you have the strangest

vocabulary ! and I sometimes feel quite relieved to think that you never said any of those sort of things in the House. But if you have not called upon Colonel Fendall, you can tell me, perhaps, if it is true what people are saying, that he has brought a boy, or a son, with him to the Combe."

"He has brought both," answered Mr. Western, laconically.

"Both ! What two of them ? "

"Well—if you want to know, they are both one."

"How provoking you are ! I am sure I don't wonder, when you are so foolish, that you are never put into any office now. You never say anything one can understand."

"Don't I ? Well, my dear, I'll try and speak to the level of your capacity. Colonel Fendall *has* brought a son—a natural son to the Combe, and in my opinion he has outraged decency by doing so."

"Do you ? I think it would have been worse if he had brought another son—a real son, you know—with him. Why, he would have wanted to stand for the county !"

"Which, this one may still do, a dozen years hence. But in the meantime the Colonel is very little more than thirty, and unmarried ; so

that, as far as I know, Barbara and Janetta may set their caps at him with every chance of success."

"Not if you won't call upon him, or anything," urged poor Mrs. Western, who looked ready to cry.

"Well, my dear, don't make yourself unhappy about it," said the good-natured husband, "but I can't promise to do much for the girls, beyond letting Fendall know that they are both ready to be married,—a fact which probably he will find out for himself. Seriously, though," he added, in a graver tone, "I should be sorry to see either of my girls the wife of Matthew Fendall, who is, and has been, ever since he was his own master, a selfish, sensual spend-thrift, utterly unworthy the honour of being the son of that kind high-bred old man, and the descendant of honest straightforward Lady Fendall."

"I wonder what makes him so different," suggested Mrs. Western, who felt, in the midst of her disappointment at this description, the necessity for keeping up the ball of conversation.

"No wonder at all; for Sir Matthew was over-yielding, over-unselfish, and not particular in accustoming his children to early habits of

obedience. He is himself so naturally excellent—so free from the alloy of the lower and baser passions, that he could scarcely foresee their existence in his sons, and especially in the children of her who, if we may believe in family tradition, was a very angel of gentleness and goodness.”

“Dead people always are,” said Mrs. Western, incidentally; “but surely Johnnie Fendall was not so bad—you have heard no scandal about *him* I hope?”

“None—unless you think the report that he is returning home to stand for the county comes under this head.”

“To stand for the county!” said, or rather screamed, his horrified wife. “Why, gracious Heavens! What will become of Dick?”

“God knows—seek his fortune in Australia, perhaps, or at the Cape of Good Hope, as many a richer man’s son has done before him!”

“Why, Richard—he’s the eldest!”

“The eldest—and there are six of them! I should like to know what business we, with our thousand a-year, have with an eldest son?”

“But you cannot help it,” suggested Mrs. Western.

“That is true? Do you think I would not

if I could? You see, my dear, that all these misfortunes are owing to the Reform Bill. Now, if I recollect right, *you* were always in favour of the bill, so you see that you have no one to blame but yourself."

"I don't see how," said mystified Mrs. Western; "and of course I was for the bill, like all our party. You surely—whatever else you might require me to do—would have objected to my going against the party?"

"Of course, my dear Maria. There you only do me justice, for I would not have seen you ratting on any considerations. Your self-sacrifice is beyond praise, and I can only trust that your devoted patriotism, and staunch adherence to Whig principles, may be ultimately rewarded by the extinction of elder sons, with that of our dandified Dick at the head of them."

CHAPTER XI.

INVITATIONS TO WESTERHAM.

“How I do hate asking such country neighbours as Bessie Forester!” said the eldest Miss Western, who was also the plainest, to her younger sister, who had some pretensions to beauty. “And she will be so horridly dressed! I am sure I hope with all my heart she will not come!”

“It all comes of Mama’s love of literary lions,” responded Janetta.

“And of her having accepted little civilities from these especial ones. It is convenient, certainly, to have one’s luncheon at the Rectory, between the services, and——Well, after all there is nothing more awkward than receiving things from that kind of people. I wish we’d never made use of Bessie’s ponies——”

“Which we did every day for a month when the Tauntons were with us; and her boat too,

because Uncle Westerham's are so old we are afraid of going to the bottom." "

"Well, never mind—all I mean is that they expect to be paid in some way, and, I dare say, never think one has done enough for them."

Janetta laughed. "It isn't much, after all, I must say, that we have—what you call—*done* for them."

"I don't know what you call much. We have asked them to luncheon again and again."

"Invitations which the Rector never by any chance accepts. While as for Bessie, she is far too off-hand and independent to come often where a clever girl like her must see she is only asked as a sort of duty. I, for my part, am sure she hates being condescended to."

"She ought to be delighted that we take any notice of her at all," said Barbara, spitefully; "and now to think of Papa having had a letter from Lord Albert Ramsey, saying that the great object of his ambition has long been to know Mr. Santland: so that Papa is going to try and make the Rector come to dinner while Lord Albert is staying here."

"And Bessie too, of course. But they may spare themselves the trouble, for I feel certain they won't come."

Lord Albert was one of the leaders of "Papa's" party, and a man distinguished for his talents, high-breeding, and political integrity. Although a younger son, he stood foremost both amongst the moneyed and landed aristocracy, and his worldly standing was in some measure a guarantee for the disinterestedness of his principles.

It was chiefly owing to the influence of Lord Albert in the Cabinet that Mr. Western had owed the short-lived honours which had been conferred upon him; for the former entertained a high opinion of the quiet county-member's inflexible honour, both in public and in private life, and he more than suspected him of possessing talents, which, in the arena of political strife, might be stirred into activity, and thus enable his party to count another and a valuable baronet within their ranks. That the result had proved his own judgment to have been at fault, was a considerable annoyance to the Minister; but he did not for that reason break off in any degree his friendly relations with the man who, weighed in the balance of public utility, had been found so wanting. This, however, was the first visit (it was during the Whitsuntide holidays) which he had ever paid to Westerham

Abbey; and the cause of its being proposed by the noble lord was, as was generally suspected, connected with the approaching election for the county.

Mrs. Western had taken the opportunity of Lord Albert's inroad into their (by themselves ill-appreciated) retirement, to call her neighbours together, that all might have an opportunity of seeing her in her capacity of hostess to a "lion," and of envying her the honour which was so far above their reach.

The letter from Lord Albert containing the wish so strongly expressed to be introduced to the Rector of Combe Hatton, caused considerable excitement at Westerham. In the first place—but that was a subject of distress only to the lady of the house—it destroyed the economy of her table, involving the necessity of inviting *two* more guests than she had originally intended to bid to the banquet, and reminding her forcibly of the painful fact, that her "silver sides," as she designated her *entrée* dishes, were not sufficient in number for a larger party than ten!

"But Mama," said Barbara, as whilst attending the rehearsal of the table-laying, she stood at one end of the "board," and with her head leaning gracefully to one side, pronounced her

judgment on what was best to be done—
“Mama, I really think we could squeeze in two more at the smaller table, and then it would be all right.”

“Impossible, Bab! you just *set* down there by me—not so close—I couldn’t move my arms. There, so it would never do to be nearer to a gentleman than that. Just take a knife and fork like me, and see if you can use your arms.”

Barbara, who was anxious to prove herself in the right, did as she was desired by her parent; and both ladies, looking hot and red and dusty, seated themselves side by side at the table, covered with its silver accessories, and began brandishing their knives and forks in a manner which, considering the Duke Humphrey-like nature of the banquet, must, to an uninitiated observer, have excited considerable doubts as to the sanity of the individuals thus singularly employed.

It was at this juncture, and just as Miss Western, who piqued herself upon her grand airs of aristocratic *nonchalance*, was conveying an imaginary morsel to her lips, that the servant, who, judging from appearances, was as ill-prepared as his mistresses for the reception of company, announced, “Colonel Fendall.”

“Gracious—goodness me!” exclaimed the lady of the house, scarcely *sotto voce*; for it was not in human nature, even under that strong pressure of necessity, to refrain from giving some vent both to her astonishment and anger. “Gracious—goodness me, John! you ought to have known it was ‘not at home.’”

The remonstrance was both a cutting and a called-for one; but it came too late. Colonel Fendall’s tall figure was already visible in the doorway, as he came forward with hand outstretched to greet his relations.

“My dear Mrs. Western, how well you *are* looking; and Barbara too—younger than ever, I declare!”

Now Miss Western having been, when last Colonel Fendall had paid her his meaningless compliments, a little not-to-be-noticed maiden of thirteen, who wore a gingham frock, and was under governess control, did not feel particularly struck by the appropriateness of the gallant officer’s panegyric: she did not, however, consider it absolutely necessary to enlighten him just then on the subject of family dates, and indeed all her faculties were engrossed for the moment by the overpowering need that existed for changing the scene, and, above all, the dress and decorations

which made Miss Barbara Western so unlike her usually well-appointed self.

“ So glad to see you ! When did you come ? How did you find your father ? ”

“ Well, thank you—not aged a day—nobody is, I declare. How is Janetta, and Western ?—as fond of his south-downs as ever ? I protest I feel as if I had never been away, it’s so jolly being at home again ! ”

And very jolly Colonel Fendall looked ! Indeed his life had been almost one long day of jollity, for this reason, first and foremost, namely, that he was one of those—I was going to say, *oily*—characters, who from their very nature repel the damping chill of misfortune and annoyance, and sail with smooth complacent movement down the stream of time, unheeding, and almost unconscious of, the storms which beat above their heads.

In person he was, as I have said, tall and athletic ; not in the least dried up or thinned by the hot air and enervating clime of India, but fresh and vigorous and well liking as though he had spent the last nine years of his existence a liver upon beef and mutton beneath the temperate sun of his own comfortable county.

“ Such a great vulgar-looking animal ! ” Barbara called him, when she rushed upstairs ten

minutes after the Colonel's arrival to smooth her hair, and tell Janetta what she thought about their cousin. "Some people might think him good-looking,—I mean people who don't care about a man having a *distingué* look."

"Which I don't so very much," mused Janetta, "provided he's known to have good blood, and has lots of money."

She was putting on a very becoming bonnet at the glass as she gave utterance to this worldly sentiment. She did not see the expression of her elder sister's face, or she might have been enlightened as to the motive of her opening remark concerning Colonel Fendall's anti-patrician appearance.

"Only think of Mama and I being caught settling the dinner-table! Mama in that horrid old cap—not that that signified; but I had got my brown-holland sleeves on; and just see my hands Janet—as dirty as any housemaid's! It really was too provoking!"

"But if he is such a vulgar-looking animal," quoted Janetta, speaking indistinctly as well as provokingly; for she was making rather an inelegant use of a pair of pouting lips, between which a large shawl pin was protruding its dangerous point.

The girl looked pretty and attractive enough, as she stood there, with her well-formed shoulders turned towards the mirror, and her head thrown coquettishly back, to make certain that the drapery which fell over her graceful figure was arranged to her satisfaction. She was going out to drive with Mrs. Western in a certain little pony-chaise much in request at the Abbey, for they were not rich either in carriages or horses; and the latter being frequently required to do duty on the farm, it followed as a matter of necessity, that the ladies were forced to content themselves—infinity to their regret—with the humble vehicle which had seen its best days, and with the services of the much-enduring pony, who was decidedly the most venerable equine inhabitant of the parish of Hillingstone.

"I thought you didn't intend to go with Mama to-day, Janetta," said Barbara spitefully.

"No more I did—but I do now," retorted Miss Janetta, who rather prided herself on speaking her mind. "I want to see Mat Fendall, and the Hazel Combe people, and to find out if Bessie Forester is to come to dinner if Mr. Santland does. How I do hope she won't, for then I can make Papa ask one of the officers."

"One of the officers! Those fools! To meet Lord Albert, too!" sneered Barbara, who had lately taken to the serious line in flirtations, and who had been getting up the Edinburgh, and a leading article or two, for "Papa's" party.

"Never mind—they're good fun, which is more than you ever got out of the ladies' gallery, where Mama always went to sleep for the evening regularly, and was so cross because Papa never spoke."

"Your Mama is waiting for you, miss," said a clean comely-looking housemaid, putting her head in at the door, and looking red and flushed: for Colonel Fendall (he was the sort of man who practised his *galanterie de garrison* whenever an opportunity offered itself) had met her in the passage, and had not disdained to say, nay even to do, what he considered the civil thing under the circumstances; and Mary—he called them all "Mary"—had been proportionately gratified and agitated.

"Coming directly," cried Janetta, snatching up her gloves, and running hastily downstairs.

"How long you have been!" said Mrs. Western peevishly. "Colonel Fendall has just gone. He said he saw your father on the top of Witham Down through the glass. I shall hide that glass,

or ask your father not to walk just there. People must go, in common civility, when they see him, and I had so many questions to ask of Mat."

"Well, never mind, Mama," said the practical Janetta, "we'll drive that way. It's scarcely any longer than the other to the Rectory; and if we meet with Colonel Fendall, you can ask him questions while I beat the pony—not that he minds it—do you, dear old Mesty?" she asked, kissing the animal's nose affectionately; for she was a good-natured girl, and had possibly some reverence for age, as exemplified in the person of Mesty—alias Methuselah—who had been a family slave any time within her memory.

During these friendly demonstrations towards the ancient retainer, Mrs. Western was settling herself in her narrow seat, causing, as she did so, considerable alarm on the part of her daughter, who entertained serious misgivings as to the capabilities of the time-worn "trap" to resist the shock of her Mama's efforts towards making herself comfortable; for the Privy Councillor's wife was rather a voluminous lady, and out of proportion therefore to the equipage in which she was about to play the part of Jehu. She had also a last year's bonnet on her head, and a dress so faded that the worthy woman's whole

appearance was better suited to a drive along a dusty English lane, than to a promenade at Longchamps, in the great exhibition-day of vernal fashions, and of the varied coqueties which belong alike to every season of the year. At least this was Janetta's reflection as she and her mother set off in pursuit of Colonel Matthew Fendall, of Hazel Combe.

CHAPTER XII.

JOLLY JOE.

HAD Colonel Fendall been able to realise the amount of prettiness which eight ripening years had wrought in his younger cousin, it is probable that his adieus to her Mama would have been less hurriedly made. This, however, not being the case, and as Mat naturally considered it waste of time to linger in conversation with a lady old enough to be his mother, he gladly took advantage of a distant glimpse which he had caught from the drawing-room window of Mr. Western on his white pony "Snowdrop ;" and, mounting his horse, he rode away in the direction of Witham Down.

The nearest lodge was half a mile distant from the Abbey, and the Colonel cantered gaily over the turf which skirted the roadside, till he passed the gate, and entered one of the narrowest and prettiest of lanes which led, in a

somewhat tortuous direction, towards the breezy upland.

The banks on either side of the road, if road it could be called, were very steep and high, and enamelled with a profusion of wild flowers which peeped and peered from out their leafy shelter, safe in their sweet lowliness from the ruthless grasp of the despoiler. Very gay and bright they were, those gorgeously-attired "grasses of the field," and each one seemed as though it had been placed by an artistic hand in the very spot where it could display its tiny beauties.

Matthew took no heed, as he rode slowly and in silence along the flower-decked lane, of all those small and exquisite details of Nature's painting, and each pretty jewel, as he passed it by, showed forth its glittering beauties amongst the bright-green leaves, and yet he saw it not. Not for him did the wood-anemone on the bank (wind-flower, the old poets called it), and the graceful clematis hanging in graceful wreaths above his head, whisper of the summer; and even the pure-white bindweed—formed, as old Pliny has it, by Nature, in her first attempt to shape that matchless thing, a lily—appealed to his sense of what was fair and elegant in vain.

But though as sweet creations, one by one, he, who had so lately journeyed back to home and rural scenes, perceived no loveliness in each tender thing he saw, there was yet a whispering spirit in the place, and a fresh and pleasant perfume in the air, which awoke a crowd of minor and half-mysterious memories in the breast of that unthinking man.

He was passing a spot where the banks were at their highest, and where the arching branches of the hazel and wild apple-trees, loaded with their blushing glories, almost shut out the sky, when from the thickest of the foliage, as it seemed to him, a nightingale's sweet note of joy rang out. How strange it sounded to him—shrill and clear—as if the bird were speaking in his very ear her song of welcome!

“How very English!” felt, rather than drawled, Mat Fendall, as for the first time for many a year his ears drank in the sounds of that bewitching tender melody.

But unappreciating as this expression of his surprise may seem, it is but fair to add that other and deeper feelings were aroused in Colonel Fendall's usually careless heart by the half-forgotten music, and the scenes which had been so familiar to him in his boyhood. He

thought of the long years which he had passed in other and less peaceful scenes—years which had prematurely bared his temples, and scattered threads of silver amongst his dark-brown hair. He was older than his age sometimes—not in seasons of gaiety, or of spirited adventure, but older in his rarely quiet moments; older when excitement, which he took stronger year by year, began to fail in its effects. Just now his thoughts, too, tinged by a passing sadness, were turned towards his brother, and a tender chord was touched within him.

“Dear old Johnnie! How long it is since we have met!” he mused. “I long to see him—long to see what he has turned out. Turned out, indeed! Have either of us *turned out*, or into, anything? I have not, for one; and yet I think it has been more from want of opportunity than anything else. There has been nothing earthly going on where I have been—always unlucky—always in the background. I really think I shall give up the Army, and get a seat in Parliament. No, that would be a bore; for my father would think I ought to marry, and that’s rather more than I could stand. If Johnnie would only come home, as he promised, something might be settled. The fact is, he *ought* to

marry. He's a quiet fellow, cut out for that kind of thing; and I shall tell my father so. Besides, how on earth am I to do anything of the kind with that boy in the way? My father is the best-intentioned man in the world, but he made a mistake *there*. I should like to know what Johnnie thinks of it, but he's so confoundedly close and cautious that I never shall. If he would only come home! And perhaps he may. My father says that he talked of leaving New Orleans on the 20th of last month, and that is—let me see—six weeks ago. What fun it would be, if he was to turn up unexpectedly, poor little fellow! I wonder how he has 'got along,' as the Yankees say, all by himself out there, and with no one to look after him."

During the lengthened soliloquy which Colonel Mat held with his own thoughts, his horse, on whose sleek neck the bridle was hanging loosely, had carried his rider beyond the green lane, and from beneath the arching trees, and was opening his nostrils to the breath of the fresher breeze, as it blew over the turf of Witham Down. A touch of his rider's spur was scarcely necessary to rouse the animal into the gallop, which soon brought them to the summit of the gradually-rising ground, from whence could be obtained a

view of the surrounding country, extending miles away in every direction, and southward to the sea, where the soft line of blue faded into greyer, colder hues, till it was lost in the undefined mysteries of the viewless air.

Colonel Fendall reined in his horse, and looked about him, remembering well the day, more than nine years before (a damp November day it was, and the scent had been wretchedly bad), when he and a knot of shivering men had sat on their jaded horses, waiting for a second "find" in the large gorse-cover just below the place where he now found himself. His eyes were fixed upon that cover now, and he was, by a sort of mechanical effort of memory, recalling the very spot whence, at last, the fox, followed by the music of the pack, broke into the "open," when he noticed an unusual movement on the farther side of the dark bushes; and in another moment the tall figure of a man raised himself from the ground on which he had been lying, and stood erect before the startled horseman.

For the colonel *was* startled,—not by the mere fact of a human being's apparition in that quiet place, but by the appearance of the individual

himself, which was far from being either agreeable or prepossessing.

He was, as I have said, tall of stature, and he was, moreover, thin, almost to the last degree of attenuation—a fact which, thanks to the extreme scantiness of his raiment, the observer had no difficulty in arriving at. His legs and feet were bare, for a pair of dirty sailor's trousers, which appeared to have been cut off at the knees, were the only covering of his lower limbs; and a fragment of a woman's woollen petticoat, also filthy and begrimed, was held by one bony hand across his hollow chest. The head was large, and covered only with a mass of grizzled hair, which hung over his wild eyes, and mingled with the beard (the growth of weeks), which half hid his wrinkled yellow throat, and made him seem like some fierce, dangerous animal, escaped from strict but necessary confinement.

He paid no heed to Fendall as he passed him by, but bent his steps slouchingly towards the lane which led to Westerham. The Colonel followed this strangely-accoutred being with his eyes, as the latter slowly descended the hill, and was hidden at last by the thick foliage which fringed the steep banks of Witham Lane.

“That's a bad fellow, if I'm not mistaken,”

mused he, when the man was out of sight; “and a dangerous one too, if one may judge by appearances. But, hah! Good God! What’s that? It sounds like a woman’s scream.” And, quick almost as the thought which prompted him to act, he put spurs to the sides of his willing horse, and in a moment was dashing down at full speed in the direction whence the sound proceeded. Again and again he heard it, but fainter, for it was deadened by the *thud* of his horse’s feet upon the ground; but still he heard it, and it was clear that the ringing cry for help came from the shady pathway (for it was little more) through which he had so lately passed on his way to the Down.

On through the leafy opening, regardless of the opposing branches, which he thrust backwards in his hurried course,—on through the sandy ruts made by the country cartwheels,—and then, at a sudden turn in the lane, he came upon a startling object, and saw at a single glance that he had done well to hasten.

In the centre of the road, which it filled up almost entirely, was a small pony-chaise, at once recognised by Fendall as the one which he had seen an hour previously waiting under the porch of Westerham Abbey. The equipage

was equally stationary now, the only difference in its appearance being that the old pony was for the moment busily employed in cropping the short sweet grass which grew upon the bank within his reach. By the side of the carriage stood, and screamed with all her power of lungs, the terrified Mrs. Western, whose hands were actively, although not very efficiently, employed in the endeavour to drag her daughter from the power of the ruffianly-looking miscreant who seemed to be mercilessly attacking her.

The situation of poor Janetta was indeed both perilous and painful, for the monster—as she ever afterwards termed him—had succeeded, as he stood behind the carriage, in dragging back her head so forcibly, that half her body hung over the rail, whilst the tightening of her bonnet-strings seemed to threaten instant suffocation. The poor girl, however, had not entirely lost either her courage or her presence of mind, and she was exhausting herself in her efforts to keep her assailant's sinewy fingers from her face and throat, when a wild exclamation of joy from Mrs. Western announced the approach of a deliverer.

“Colonel Fendall! Thank God! We are being murdered! Save us—save Janetta!” the

poor lady cried, hysterically: and then, in a paroxysm of gratitude and delight, she threw her arms with rather inconvenient tightness round the knee of her champion.

But in spite of this obstruction, which he put aside with little ceremony, Colonel Fendall was off his horse in a moment, and laid his hand on the bony shoulders of Janetta's tormenter.

"Off, rascal!" he cried, as he administered some powerful blows with his riding-whip on the wretch's shrinking person, while Mrs. Western screamed aloud—

"Don't let him go, Colonel Fendall; for Heaven's sake, don't let him go! He'll murder us again—he'll——"

But at the mention of the Colonel's name, the maniac—for such they now suspected him to be—turned fiercely round, and tossing his shaggy hair from off his forehead, looked with a strange inquiring earnestness into Fendall's face. For a few moments he remained perfectly motionless, breathing with hot and foetid breath into the very nostrils of the astonished gentleman, who, now convinced of the miserable man's insanity, experienced that nameless shrinking known to the bravest men when brought in contact with a lunatic.

“You a Fendall!” yelled the man at length. “She called you Fendall, did she, the darned fool! Why, he is a smart boy—a fellow with a sword that killed the Princess Charlotte, and walked to Babylon with the baby on his head. You’re not a Fendall: but I’ll do your business all the same for that, or my name’s not Jolly Joe.” And with the rapidity of lightning, the wretched creature drew a knife from under his ragged mantle, and made a rush with it at Fendall’s throat.

But the latter was too quick for him; for, with the heavy handle of his riding-whip, he intercepted the deadly weapon with such a crashing blow, that “Jolly Joe,” as he had called himself, fell to the ground at once, inert and, to all appearance, lifeless.

“Poor man!” cried Janetta, recovering herself; whilst her mother added to this commentary, “Don’t look at him, my dear—it’s too horrid.”

They were both deadly pale, and only seemed quite alive to the necessity of overpowering their deliverer with thanks.

“You had better drive home,” said the Colonel, who, for some reason or other, appeared terribly overcome by the adventure; “you had

better drive home, while I see what can be done for this poor wretch."

"No, not home, Mama, please," said Janetta, who, weak and frightened though she felt, was fully alive to the anticipated delight of talking over her adventure. "And, Colonel Fendall, do come with us to the Rectory. You mustn't stay here. Think if he was to come to life again."

"Not very likely, I fear," said the Colonel, looking down on the motionless body, while something very like tears rose to his eyes, and made his voice sound thick and indistinct.

In truth, it was a shocking spectacle that which Mrs. Western wisely bade her daughter pass by on the other side, and look not on it; for the substitute for an upper garment had fallen off from the poor lean frame, exposing to view the lines of convex ribs *just* covered by the unhealthy skin, and the sunk chest, now still as if in death.

The blood, which kept trickling from the deep wound upon his brow, streaked the naked breast with its red meandering threads; and as Mat Fendall, stooping down, gazed upon the hideous picture, a groan burst from his heart, and caused much wonder in Mrs. Western's breast.

"He is alive, I think—and hope; so I will

ride at once for help," said Fendall, who seemed restored to energy by this new view of the affair. "Janetta," he added, turning to his young cousin, who, feeling like the important heroine of a melodrama, was beginning to think herself extremely illused and neglected; "Janetta, do forgive me, dear, for seeming to forget you. You look so very nice, too," said the Colonel insinuatingly; and recollecting, even in the agitation and excitement of the moment, his usual efficacious mode of softening the fair sex towards him. "You look so very nice! I only trust that the wretched fellow did not touch you. And now, Mrs. Western, do take her away. Here, old fellow," addressing himself to the pony, "wake up, and be useful to the ladies. That's right—are you quite comfortable, Mrs. Western?" And after thus settling the discomfited ladies in their crazy-looking vehicle, he pressed Janetta's hand softly, and saw them (with a sigh of relief) drive slowly off.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COLONEL'S "LITTLE SCRAPE."

IT wanted but a week to the important day when the long-thought-of ball at Westerham Abbey was expected to "come off;" and Dr. Shirly, as was frequently his wont, had arrived on a two-days' visit to his old friend's Rectory.

The two men had grown to sober middle-age together, and Time, far from loosening the bonds of intimacy and friendship, had but cemented the ties by which a mutual and boyish liking had originally drawn together those apparently not dissimilar characters.

But although the lookers-on at that life-long friendship might deem the natures of those two gifted men to be sufficiently congenial as regarded their tastes, their habits, and their predilections, yet a refutation of that opinion could be easily found, were it only in the premature marks of age visible in the person of the skilful physician, on whose bearing and lineaments the

overworkings of an ever-unresting brain had set their lasting signet. The extreme earnestness with which he set himself to contend with every difficulty he encountered, and the intensity of feeling for other's woes, which during his long and arduous practice the habitual sight of suffering had never dulled, could be read in every expressive line of his marked and speaking countenance; and in this respect he differed widely from his friend, whose mind was too habitually engrossed by the analyzation of his own sentiments to have much real sympathy with the wants and woes of his fellow-creatures.

Had the physician been one less given both to feel for, and in some respects to identify himself, as it were, with his fellow-men, the amount of self-concentration which he could not but observe in Santland would probably have materially interfered with the continuance of their intimacy; but a generous pity for the weaknesses which he felt he shared, formed the basis of this singular man's character; moreover, he was endowed with a remarkable aptitude for the interpreting of words, as they regarded the concealment or the unfolding of thoughts; and had thus come to the conclusion that Santland was at heart a miserable man—miserable, in that he clung with

morbid tenacity to a life beyond which he could not see with eyes of faith the wonders of a hereafter.

Perhaps the pleasantest moments in the Rector's life were those which he spent with the one friend whose character and conduct inspired him at the same time both with affection and respect. Many hours of the short holiday which Dr. Shirly's often-failing health obliged him not unfrequently to take, were spent by the friends in the lengthened walks in which they both delighted, and in the discussion of questions which the presence of Bessie might often have caused them to avoid, as unsafe or inexpedient. For the creeds of both on many subjects were such as, to a young and guileless mind, they would have hesitated to avow: and dangerously far as Santland had allowed his mind to wander into the regions of doubt, he guarded carefully his little Bessie's thoughts from evil—keeping her in the pure and simple faith in which her infancy had passed away, and valuing her childish innocence as though she were indeed a very angel in the house.

"That is a pretty cottage," remarked the Doctor, arresting his companion's steps as they came in front of a little nest-like dwelling, with

a low thatched roof, and walls covered with ivy and with twining creepers.

"Is it not? As pretty a cottage as there is on Sir Matthew's estate. One of his under-bailiffs lives there now—a man I have a bad opinion of; but he has a civil fawning manner, which great people like, although they neither own nor know it."

They were looking over the low sweetbriar hedge which divided the cottage-garden from the road, and a respectable-looking woman, a parishioner of the Rector's, seeing his face above the fence, stepped out, and civilly asked them to come in and rest themselves.

The invitation was accepted, and the two gentlemen were shown into the cool neat parlour by their middle-aged attendant.

"So," said the Rector, taking off his hat, as he rested himself on the old-fashioned wooden chair; "so, you have the flowers in the window just the same, I see, as when poor Hannum lived here?"

"I have, sir. Missus is very kind, and lets me keep some things as they waur when my poor brother lived here. But sure there is a sight of changes! Sir," she added, speaking to Dr. Shirly, "won't you please be seated? I

have got a letter, sir," she continued, again addressing the Rector (and taking one from her pocket as she spoke)—"a letter that comed all the way from Lancasheer, saying that little Myles—so they call the boy—is gone with the Colonel; and I'd like to ask, sir, if I might make so free, whether I should be doing wrong if I stepped up to Hazel Combe and asked to see the child?"

Mr. Santland could scarcely repress a smile at the woman's simple question.

"Why, Martha," he said, "you must have taken leave of your senses. Don't you know that the Colonel is bringing up the boy to be a gentleman?"

"He is my own nevey," began the poor pleader.

"No, he is not, my good woman; he is nobody's nevey, as you call it. He has not a relation in the world, and never had, except his mother; and she, poor soul, is gone to God, as you well know, this many a year ago."

"And better for her—far better for her," sobbed Martha, who had seemed from the beginning of the interview to be very tearfully inclined.

"There can be no doubt about that, for no

one can insult and look down upon her now ; and as for you, Martha, my advice is, that you abstain from doing what you have set your heart upon, which is, as you know perfectly well, to get all the neighbours together, and tell every one that will listen to you that your nevey is a gentleman. Why, woman, you must be mad to think of such a thing ! ”

“ I am not, sir,” said the ambitious woman ; “ only the neighbours do be casting it up to me about poor Annie’s misfortune, and——”

“ Nonsense ! The neighbours have nothing to do with it, and you had less.”

“ Indeed I had, sir. Ten years ago, and though I wasn’t to say an old woman then——”

“ What on earth has that to do with it ? The boy is not yours, but your niece’s ; and, as I said before, the wisest thing is to bury the past in oblivion, which means that the least said is the soonest mended. Take my word for it, Martha, that we never repent of saying too little, and that you had far better put salt instead of sugar into your master’s Sunday pudding, or make your neighbours talk by tying your cap-strings behind, than hint a word about your imagined relationship to Master Myles Fendall. His father is doing the best in his

power to make amends for what is past and gone, and it is not every man in Colonel Fendall's position who would do as much. So my advice is, that you put a bridle, if possible, on your tongue, and forget, if you can, that ten years ago poor little Annie Hannum made a fool of herself."

"Will she take your advice, think you?" asked Dr. Shirly of the Rector, as they slowly strolled homewards.

"Not she. Old Martha is essentially a gossip, and will find it hard to resist the temptation of talking to the villagers of her right to relationship with the Fendall family. Besides, what woman ever kept a secret, except one the revelation of which would bring the blush of shame for her own conduct into her cheek?"

"But, from what I can gather, the poor creature seems to feel considerable sorrow for the errors of one who was near and dear to her."

"Yes; the whole family felt it, for it was matter for public village scandal, and not only village but county scandal; since, in the absence of more exciting events, the ladies around Hillingstone (who, like other ladies, take an interest in such stories) soiled their fair hands by the

dirt they threw at poor Annie Hannum, when her misfortune, and Captain Fendall's admiration, became the public talk."

"And of course Captain Fendall's share in the 'misfortune' came in for a very small amount (comparatively speaking) of public reprobation?"

"Naturally. It is only women, only the weaker vessel which is broken and crushed in the rushing torrent by contact with the hard unyielding metal of man's tyrannic passions. It is only women who, whether absent or present, are always in the wrong, and always hardly dealt with, and never excused, when timidity, vanity, all the lesser passions combine to work their downfall!"

"Lesser passions! If fear and vanity come under that head in your vocabulary, I marvel which you denominate the larger ones?"

"Love and hatred; but I stand corrected, for I was wrong to class vanity as a secondary mover in either men or women's conduct in this our life of trial and temptation."

"But, about this story? And who and what was Annie, the heroine, as it seems to me, of a romantic adventure?"

"I see no romance," replied Santland, rather

shortly, "in an affair of everyday and vulgar occurrence. Matthew Fendall, like many another young ass who pants for pleasure, chose to quench his thirst at every source, however turbid might be the stream or poisonous the well at which he drank. Not that there was anything either particularly turbid or perilous in poor little Annie Hannum, for she was as good a girl as ever lived, only ——"

"Then why, in the name of justice, did he not make an honest woman of her?—or rather, show a tardy honesty himself, and restore, as far as might be, the treasure of which he had deprived her?"

Santland almost laughed.

"When you have seen the Colonel," he said, "you will better understand the impracticability and utter incongruousness of such a proceeding. And, besides, misfortunes should only be judged relatively, or, rather, by comparison. Of course poor Annie's folly had brought him to considerable trouble; but I question whether a marriage to a man, and into a family, so infinitely above her in social position, would, all things considered, as regarded her own chances of happiness, have mended the matter. However, it is many a year too late to discuss

the question now ; and as, in providing for the boy, Colonel Fendall is acting like an honest and a feeling man, what occurred before had better be buried in oblivion."

Dr. Shirly was a man of tact as well as talent, and therefore, perceiving that the subject was, for some cause or other, distasteful to his companion, he gradually changed the topic of conversation to other and more welcome themes.

But, inasmuch as we have not the fear of the Rector's moody brows before our eyes, I shall entreat the reader's patience whilst I explain, with as little circumlocution as possible, the antecedents of the young gentleman (Mrs. Martha's *nevey*), who, in the opinion of many, and of the county generally, had no business whatever in the ancient and respectable halls of Hazel Combe.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GARDENER'S DAUGHTER.

JOSEPH HANNUM was one of the few under-gardeners employed by the noble owner of Westerham Abbey, and he had, when the misfortune fell upon his family which made him from that hour an altered man, lived for more than forty years, man and boy, in the pretty roadside cottage which had excited Dr. Shirly's notice. He had received rather a better education than in those days usually fell to the lot of the lower ten-million. He could read easy books, and he could, moreover, write after his fashion; for which reasons, and for others I could name, he held his head a little above the common herd, and was well pleased that his family should do the same.

Joseph had been twice married—the first time to a rich farmer's daughter, whose relations, considering that she had been guilty of a *mesalliance*, turned their backs upon her, the which

act of rustic "finery" gave but little pain to worthy Mrs. Hannum; for, as she shrewdly remarked, "Them as is capable of such 'artless conduct isn't worth the troubling after."

She was a good wife to Joseph while she lived, which was not long; for, only three summers after the memorable one when the gardener took his bride over the Westerham gardens to show her all their gaudy horticultural treasures, she sickened of a fever, which was then epidemic in the village; and the parents, who had looked down upon their son-in-law as one of low degree, met him after his sudden affliction by the silent solemn grave, where their tears mingled with the new-made widower's, and the hand of friendship was extended to the sorrowing man.

His little daughter they adopted as their own; for, as they said, "What can a single man do with a young child, and how attend to all its wants and ailments?" They never seemed to think it possible that Joseph—having tasted of the great comfort which it is to a poor toiling man to have his dinners cooked, and his Sunday shirt made ready for him—should without loss of time look round about him for another helpmate. And when he found one, they were as indignant with the poor lonely fellow as in the days when

he made a gardener's wife of their only daughter—the “respectable young person,” who, but for him, might have married as well-to-do a tradesman as lived in the town of Hillingstone, “And been alive, bless you! (so the disappointed mother was wont to remark) to this day.”

That worthy matron felt, I regret to say, no pity for Joseph when his new wife proved herself in some respects but a poor substitute for the one whom he had lost; but, on the contrary, she rather rejoiced in the fulfilment of certain prophecies which she had been known to utter; for is not the “I told you so” a cry of triumph, which few feminine natures are magnanimous enough to refrain from uttering?

Mrs. Hannum the Second was a hardworking and a bustling body—as much inferior in education, and in the kind of coarse refinement which Joseph had learned to value, as *he* had been to the pleasant-mannered, pretty wife whom but a year before he had followed to the grave.

Meanwhile, the culture of flowers was with the gardener not only a business but a passion; and even when duty did not call him to his labour, he would gladly escape out of hearing of his wife's loud voice (it was not a cross one, only naturally unmusical) to the society of the living, silent

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things, the culture of which was his daily care.

Many children were granted to them, but the Hannums were what is called unfortunate in their family; for the boys (there were only sons for some years born at the cottage) came into the world the victims of that fell disease which is the early curse of many an English child. It took various forms with those poor children, whose mother was so healthy, strong, and active, and who appeared to multiply herself in her unremitting attendance on her helpless offspring.

But whilst Mrs. Hannum looked with no disgust at her big-headed Jack, who was soon discovered by the neighbours to "be not all there," and while she went perseveringly "for doctor's stuff," and sat up night after night in uncomplaining patience with Jemmy, whose state was such that his best friends pronounced that "it would be a mercy if it should please God to take him!"—I repeat, that while the mother thus performed with long-suffering devotion her mournful duty, Joseph looked on in disgust and weariness, repeating oftentimes to himself that his dead Sarah's children would have been comforts instead of plagues to him;

for was not Mary at the Upper Farm the very picture of health, and the very image of cheerfulness and sweet temper?

At last a girl (and this chanced when her half-sister was about ten years old) was born one summer night in the pretty cottage, where hitherto only those poor heaven-visited boys had reminded the repining gardener that there were such things as children. The latticed windows were thrown open for the entrance of the evening breeze, when the expecting father heard a new-born infant's cry. There was no joy within his breast, for he groaned aloud as he listened to the feeble voice; but when the skilled woman of the village brought the wailing atom to him, and announced its sex, he took it in his arms, and bade God bless it.

"Thee be come just in time, my lass," he murmured; "for I was beginning to think 'em poisonous things, them arrows that we've got a quiver full of: but, please God give you health, my little woman, and I'll not complain that I've another mouth to feed."

And God did give her health, and with that precious blessing the far more doubtful one of beauty; although Joseph, you may be sure, saw no evil in Annie's growing loveliness, but, on the

contrary, indulged and spoilt her all the more in that he was so proud of her blue eyes, and her blush-rose-like skin; whilst Mrs. Hannum (which was natural, perhaps) grew jealous of the child, its father's plaything and companion, and gave more time and care than ever to the ailing and afflicted ones, whose presence and existence their father had almost ceased to notice or to remember.

Meanwhile little Annie's half-sister, the adopted child of the prosperous owners of the "Upper Farm," had conceived an affection so strong and irrepressible for the lovely child, who trotted after her father as he pursued his work in the grand old Abbey gardens, that the aged people ceased at last to object to an intimacy at which their pride revolted. Mary was no beauty, but she was cheerful, good, and sensible—well-principled too, and a favourite with all who knew her worth; whereas Annie's merits and claims to affection were acknowledged at once (as long at least as she was a child) from the mere fact that she was lovely.

But, as her childish beauty ripened into womanly attractions, the favour of her own sex decreased, whilst that of the other grew more fervid in proportion to that decline. The time

was when no notice was taken by the village gossips of the expensive garments (expensive, for his limited means) which adorned the fairylike beauty of the gardener's daughter; but when a tall fair girl, with long rich auburn curls, and a face and figure in which woman's feelings, as well as woman's charms, were beginning to develop themselves, was seen at church (that theatre for the display of village beauty) in a gown for which, according to the gossips' calculations, her father could ill afford to pay, then they turned upon the youthful beauty actively.

"What right has such as she to wear a gown like that!" said Mrs. Mee, the grocer's wife.

"And then her bonnet! Such a ribbon!" said Mrs. Lee, whose husband kept the post-office. "Why, lauk a' me, I'd have thought twice before I spent *my* money on such frippery."

But the frippery worn on that especial Sunday, however greatly it had discomposed the spirits and interfered with the devotions of the censorious ladies, had been extremely becoming to the fair young beauty of the gardener's daughter. There was a little stir of vanity within her breast (not much, for she was a good, simple girl) when she adorned herself that day

for church. And, after all, the dress was very humble, made of some thin cotton fabric (for the day was warm) and it was blue—pale-blue, as were the strings of her small bonnet, and the flowers, few in number and quite fresh of hue, which mingled with the rich auburn of her hair.

She had folded her prayer-book carefully in her white cotton handkerchief, and having kissed her mother (who stayed at home to cook the dinner), she walked by her father's side along the fields to church.

They sat on a long bench at the far end of the small edifice—an edifice with walls on which the disfiguring whitewash had been laid on thickly, and with careless hands. The pews were numerous, and devoted to the use of those who could afford to pay for such a luxury. High were the walls to most of those small pens, where the respective fathers of their decent-looking families could pray or sleep, as religion or as human frailty moved them; but higher still than all were the reserved seats of the great local aristocracy—the Westerhams and Fendalls, who, behind their crimson curtains, hid themselves and their devotions from the prying eyes of the then-called "common people."

It was a hot day in July—so hot that drowsi-


ness in Mr. Santland's congregation came under the head of an excusable weakness, and even the somewhat noisy slumbers on the part of the more aged amongst the assemblage, might almost be looked upon as a venial sin.

In winter, that time-worn place of worship, over the exterior walls of which the ivy grew in rank luxuriance, was cold and damp; but on that midsummer day, with the sun shedding his fiercest rays upon the large southern windows, those who worshipped beneath the panes of ancient painted glass felt baked and scorched up by the blazing glory.

Amidst those on whom the pitiless planet shone the fiercest was the gardener's daughter! Full on her fair head the rays descended, playing through the crimson glass on her bright auburn hair, and bringing deeper roses to her cheeks. Often before had Annie panted in the summer-time beneath that sunlit window—often before had she loosened the handkerchief which bound her slender throat, unmindful of the many admiring glances of the rustics round her, and striving only with a single purpose to render more endurable the heat which was oppressing her.

But on that memorable day, and precisely at

the moment when the village choir, with more zeal than skill, broke out into their accustomed melody, Annie, chancing to glance upwards from her hymn-book, saw above the curtains of Sir Matthew's pew a pair of dark and sparkling eyes, which seemed as though they had become riveted upon her. She could not keep her own upon them for a second, but looking down, with a suddenness which showed her all-untutored in the arts of coquetry, a blush (more beautiful than that which a shade of deepest rose-colour sheds through crystal upon a marble statue) flushed over cheek and brow; and in an instant, quick as the flash of thought, a new life was infused into the unsuspecting child, and under the influence of that bewildering magnetism, the virgin purity of her young heart received the first taint, which was to be washed out no more for ever.



CHAPTER XV.

ANNIE LEARNS A LESSON.

THE winter of that year was the severest with which England had been visited for at least twenty preceding seasons. It commenced as early as November, and throughout the two succeeding months it continued with unabated rigour. Of course, the hunting was stopped, and the out-of-door amusements of the young gentlemen belonging to the respective houses of Westerham and Hazel Combe were limited to skating on the frozen ponds, and duck-shooting, wherever aquatic birds did congregate.

The spoiled children of prosperity accounted this "good fun" at first ; but after awhile they grew wearied of the monotonous routine of sport, and several of them, amongst whom was the young dragoon, betook themselves elsewhere for excitement and for change.

It was on the day preceding this departure that Joseph Hannum became for the first time

aware of the change which had come over Annie's spirits, and, it not being the custom of his class to waste time by preparation and circumlocution, he gave expression to his anxiety at once.

"Why, Annie lass, what ails thee?" he asked. "Thou'rt pale as a sperrit child!"

"It's the headache, father, and the cold. I don't get out enough; but mother wants this jacket finished for Jemmy, and——"

"Drat it! let Jemmy's jacket be, and put thy bonnet on, my dear. The cold's a great misfortune, surely, but thee musn't get the sickness along of it. It 'ud do me a power of good to do a turn of work, but not a spade 'ud get an inch into the ground till this frost breaks up: and Heaven help the poor, say I, as isn't paid in yearly wages!"

Annie did not lose a moment, after the permission thus accorded her to brave her mother's displeasure; for she was out in the frosty air of the cold December evening before that mother missed the warm cloth cloak from its accustomed place, or the little bonnet which Annie used to hang on a wooden peg beside her bed.

Matthew Fendall was waiting for the girl by the side of a leafless wood, on which the frost-

work still hung, like strings of crystal, meet for an ice-queen's bridal ornaments.

He had been there full ten minutes—a grievous hardship; for in his impatience (hardly a lover's now) the time had seemed far longer. What wonder, then—seeing how many were the calls upon his attention necessitated by his approaching journey—that the tones of his greeting should have been somewhat tinctured by fretfulness?

“How late you are!” he cried.

The words had been repeated scores of times before, but in a different tone from that which now struck coldly upon her heart.

“I am so sorry!” Annie murmured, in a breathless voice; for her quick walking, joined to cold and agitation, made her words come painfully.

“Yes, I had given you up. But, Annie dear, how white you look! Where are your roses, pretty one?” And Matthew—who was too young, and perhaps too kind of heart by nature, to be quite ungrateful to the girl who had given up all for him, and deemed that all well lost—drew her tenderly to his breast and kissed her.

She was revived by the warmth of that short caress, and hardly noticed that it was more *tepid*

than in the days when Fendall had sworn the oaths which she had trusted to—that he would love only her, and love for ever.

She had a tale to tell him—a tale as old and often told as were the simple, well-known arts which he had used to ruin her. She had kept her secret hitherto, though it had burned within her breast like a consuming fire, and sat like an avenging spirit at her nightly pillow, chasing away the blessed angel sleep with cries of dark forebodings. And yet, withal, there had been a kind of poetry even in the midst of her deep distress. She had been loved by that great handsome gentleman—that soldier, who, to her, had such a lordly mien, and who spoke so softly as he bent those loving but commanding looks upon her. The poor child almost gloried in the thought—may God forgive her!—that the time might come when she, the humble gardener's daughter, would give breath and life to one of such a noble race!

She never thought about details or future difficulties. Perhaps, too, there had appeared before her once a dim, uncertain vista, in which there rose the spire of a village church—the church she used to pray in—and towards the sacred building there seemed walking a little

simple girl, clothed all in white, and led by such a gallant gentleman! The neighbours, too, were there—the neighbours, who would not dare to flout her, while they watched her as she passed between the silent graves, protected by Sir Matthew's noble son, who held within his hand the wedding-ring, and who was about to ratify at the altar the vows which, months before, had made her, as she felt, his own for ever.

But if these were amongst the hopeful fancies which has assisted little simple Annie to support her cross in patience and in silence, they melted all away beneath the dissolving flood of cold reality.

"I am sorry you told me nothing of all this before," said Matthew, breaking the silence had followed on poor Annie's confession, and speaking in a changed and frigid voice.

Very guilty, and most troublesome, she was afraid he thought her, so she did not speak, but only held her poor head down, and let the large tears fall unheeded on the ribbon-strings of her bonnet.

"You might have written, surely, before it came to this?" he added, with increasing petulance.

She write ! Good Heaven ! She would as soon have deemed it possible or fitting to write a statement of her difficulties to King George upon his throne ; and so she murmured gently, when her tears would let her speak, that she was afraid,—she did not want to vex him,—she would rather bear it all herself : which was quite true. And as she looked up timidly in her lover's face, with blue eyes glistening through their long wet lashes, she looked so fair and good and pure, that the spoiler took shame to himself, and said more gently—

“ I am very sorry for all this, Annie—very sorry. Now it is too late ; but I will do all I can. You shall not want for money, and——”

“ Money cannot help me,” sobbed the girl, who would have spoken proudly but for her now crushing misery.

“ Not want it ! That's nonsense. You shall have all that I can spare, which is not much.” Nor was it ; for the sum considered by Matthew as superfluous cash, after his necessary pleasures were provided for, was one very easily cast up. “ You must have what is sufficient for you, Annie, of course ; and—and, you must leave the neighbourhood as soon as the change can be arranged.”

She was sobbing bitterly now ; but she only murmured, between the convulsive catchings of her breath—

“Poor father, it will break his heart !”

There was something very touching in the child's look of patient but hopeless wretchedness ; and Fendall, who had felt rather proud of himself whilst speaking of his intended liberality, was drawn again by the sight of her tears to a juster, truer appreciation of the evil he had wrought.

“Don't cry so, darling,” he said ; “you will make me miserable.” (He knew by experience that this was an all-prevailing reason for compliance with any wish of his.) “Don't cry, and I will think the matter over, and write to you. I need not urge you to keep this unhappy business secret. It would never do to have it known ; and now”—looking at his watch—“I must go home, and see my father. So Annie, love, hard as it is, the time has come for us to part, and for you to show me what a courageous little woman you can be.”

He took her girlish face between his hands, and kissed it fondly on the cheeks and lips, and was surprised to feel how marble cold they were. It was as though the bitter tears that fell from

her soft eyes had frozen into icicles, so changed from its warm accustomed glow was that sweet pouting mouth.

She turned away and left him, with a hard and cold despair tugging at her heartstrings, and with a strange wild wish to lie upon the frozen ground, and rise no more a breathing thing, to live and suffer.

Very hard was it for one so young to bear with a calm face, and with no outward signs of suffering, the cruel lot which had befallen her. But hard as it was at first, after awhile she grew in some degree accustomed to it; and, for that matter, so did those around her to a certain gravity and quiet thoughtfulness which had gradually stolen over little Annie's face.

There was a breaking-up to this almost unnatural calmness when Annie one day found a letter at the post-office from Mr. Fendall. It was a kind letter, and a sensible one,—too sensible, perhaps, for a very young man under the circumstances to have written to his mistress; and Annie's tears flowed freely as she read the wise, well-written lines. But the sight of the money tried her fortitude the most. There were but a few bank-notes; she did not count them, but thrust them into her pocket, as though their


sight reminded her too painfully that her days at home were numbered, and that she must soon leave her father's house, and wander forth into a land of strangers.

A week elapsed, and still the snow lay thick upon the frost-bound earth, like a white pall above a sorrowing world; for the distress was great amongst the poor, and their cry went up throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Still, cold though it was, and winter yet in all its bleak intensity, the days had begun to lengthen; for the first month of a new year had nearly reached its close, and spring was talked of as a thing to be, yet scarcely yet believed in.

Idleness—the consequence of the season's rigidity, not his own will—had in some measure told upon Joseph Hannum's temper. He was too much in the house, where his wife's busy habits and Annie's loss of cheerfulness disturbed him; and often a fretful exclamation would escape him, and a harsh word sometimes even to the last-born twins: they were both girls, and promised to rival sister Annie in their budding beauty.

"Where is sister gone to?" the father asked of one (the eldest, and the wisest), as she sat



perched upon a table by the window admiring the glittering frost-work which had made mimic leaves and branches on the well-cleaned panes.

“Lor,’ Hannum, how should Jenny know?” replied the mother, who was always ready to speak on anyone’s business besides her own. “She’s gone to the Upper Farm, I warrant you, to see her sister. She has no proper pride, Annie hasn’t, and so I often tells her. Another girl would be, ashamed to go so often to them as treats her father and his family like dirt; but with her it’s ‘sister Mary here,’ and ‘sister Mary there,’ till I’m sick of it.”

Joseph was on the point of replying, and that angrily enough, to his wife’s remark, when he was interrupted by a cry from Jenny, and a sudden jumping off the table, preparatory to a spring into her half-sister’s arms; for Mary Hannum, who had just made her unexpected appearance, was a favourite with every one, always excepting her active and susceptible step-mother.

The adopted daughter of the wealthy Upper Farm tenants clasped her small half-sister in her arms, in which for a short half-minute she held her closely; and then, having set her burthen down, Hannum could see a face whose paleness

and frightened expression not a little startled and discomposed him.

"Father," she said gravely, "come into the outer air with me, for I have something to tell you of."

She spoke with an air of strange authority, so that he, without a question asked, followed her into the adjacent wood. Even then she did not speak, but putting a letter into his hands, she stepped a pace behind him whilst he read it.

Hannum was a good scholar, as he had often boasted, and therefore found no difficulty in deciphering the words, which ran as follows:—

"Father, I have given this letter to Mary for you, as I have been a wicked girl, and dare not give it to you myself. I am ashamed to stay at home, for you would fear the neighbours would know about my trouble, and mother would find it hard to forgive me. Father, you will tell mother that I am very unhappy—so unhappy that I am afraid to pray, and I wish that I could die. I will not tell any one where I am going, but I have got money enough to keep me, and you will be sorry for me—won't you, father?—and won't think hardly of your little girl, who will pray for you, though she has been too wicked to pray for herself."

This was all. There was no signature, and the father read the letter twice before he seemed in any sort to understand its purport. Then he threw it violently on the ground, and setting his heel upon it furiously, said with a loud voice—

“Gone! Curse her!”

“Oh, father!” exclaimed Mary, piteously.

“Off, girl! Don’t touch me, or I shall do you a mischief, which I should be sorry for. I never loved a child of you but her, and she has shamed me! Not curse her!—I like that. There’s nothing left but curses——”

“Not for *her*, father; think what a child she was, and——”

“Ah!” he broke in, as if a sudden thought had struck him—“Ah! there is more to curse than her. You knew about it, Mary, and you kept it hid. You knew there was a villain after her, and you held your tongue; you——”

“I did not, father; God in heaven knows I did not!”

“But you have got a letter from her, too. I see it in your hand. What does she say? And who is the rascal that shall do her justice, if there is a God in heaven or a d——l in hell?”

“She does not speak of justice or of punishment,” said Mary, in a voice which was siri-

gularly calming and persuasive. "But listen to her words, dear father, and then you may condemn her, if you can."

"Tell my poor father," Annie wrote, "that he can do nothing for me but forget me. *He* is too high above us, and would only think to pay with money for what has chanced to me. It was my fault to trust to such a high-up gentleman, but then I thought he was *so* high, he would not go so low as to deceive me. Ah me, Mary! I was very proud when he first told me that he loved me. I never looked on to the end. Tell father so, if he will listen to you, and tell him, too, to go to Parson Santland—he's a kind man, and will advise him. You'd best forget me—all of you, dear Mary. Ah me! I shall never see the dear old garden and the beech-wood again. I feel as if I was gone away to die, and do not dare to say, God bless you, and good-bye."

There were strange workings on the hard face of Joseph Hannum, whilst his daughter read these plaintive words; and when she ended (he had striven hard against the growing weakness), the strong man fairly broke down, and covering his face with his hands, he sobbed loud and unrestrainedly.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MIDNIGHT VISIT.

THE approach of the eleventh hour had been for some time indicated by the hand of the curious old clock which stood above the Rectory staircase; and at last—it was the evening of the day when Joseph Hannum had received his daughter's letter—the lonely occupier of his quiet library could feel that he was safe from the intrusion of household sounds, and that human voices would disturb him on that day no more.

It was a curious study, that small room, over whose door was inscribed Horace's wise injunction—*Doctrina vim promovet insitam*—and in which so much of wit and wisdom, thought and learning, lay empiled upon the shelves, and massed in the comprehensive brain of him whose life was chiefly passed amongst those eloquently silent companions.

They were his friends, those books—serious

and earnest friends the most of them ; whilst for his intervals of relaxation, and for the gratification of his luxurious intellectual sensualism, there were the grand old classic poets—sources strong and undiluted, from which the witty and the wise have, since the ancient times (those times when the rare stars shone out so brightly), drawn their happiest inspirations : and Santland, with all those well-trying, choice companions near him, was never known to sigh for more material pleasures ; or for a sight of beauty less all-coldly fair than the sweet alabaster Venus in her niche beside his chair, or the few rare pictures, perfect gems of art, which hung upon his study walls.

In the midst of these cherished treasures, the man whose life had been a mystery spent his solitary hours in a sublimer world than that in which, if evil tongues could be believed, his earlier and more stormy days had passed away.

There are few of us—let who will deny the fact—who go through life without some intimate, congenial friend—some bosom counsellor, into whose breast we can pour a portion of our hidden selves, the while we hear, or think we hear, an echo to the “avalanche of thought.”

But few as are the number of those who think

they need not sympathy, the Rector of Combe-Hatton might be classed as one; for though from the inaccessible heights of the strange student's musings, a happy chance produced sometimes (beneath the sun of dear and close companionship) a momentary melting, no genial flow of confidence poured from the languid stream, and soon the current turned to ice again, with its hard surface colder even than before.

On the evening in question, the Rector was seated before his library table, with a sheet of letter-paper spread out before him. Ostensibly he was occupied in writing a letter to his old friend, Dr. Shirly; but the task was not pursued continuously, inasmuch as the pen lay often idly by his side, whilst the writer leant back indolently in his chair, with a deeper shade of thought than usual darkening his broad brow.

"I cannot see the harm,"—these were amongst the last words he had transcribed, and the ink was still wet upon the page,—“I cannot see the harm of what you call your patient's new theory. In the first place, it is anything but original; for did not Spinoza dream of it when he made merry with his spiders? And did not Aristotle? Pshaw! it may be older still for aught we know—older than the hills. By the way, why

are hills called everlasting, when, at this very moment, there are hired boors—ruthless working-men—carrying away my beautiful Witham Down by barrowsful? Jane, the footwoman, looks on in wonder, the great goose, and cannot understand me when I tell her that they are busy making a level road, along which trains of mighty chariots—the chariots of the Prince of the Power of Steam—will soon be passing to and fro, and will not tarry. But, as regards little Johnnie Fendall and his creed, I have only this to say, namely, that if he mortifies his body by eating only angel's food,—that is, according to you, Abernethy biscuits and weak brandy-and-water—it is because he likes to do it, and with his likings and dislikings you have nothing earthly to do. He apparently prefers what he considers his intellectual part (though where about him he would search for that portion of his individuality it would be hard to say) to his frail little body, whose essence and senses he can in some sort understand. You say that he is leading an unnatural and an unhealthy life, and that by his efforts to ensure immortality by the sacrifice of all his bodily tastes and desires, he is making himself a miserable man. Well, you may be right; but, as I said before, the lad is the best

judge of his own affairs, and there is something gained if he obtains a reputation for good living. There can be little doubt, too, that there is no mortification in abstaining from an indulgence in pleasures for which it is clear that Master Johnnie has no taste. The more I see of life, the more convinced I am that no one is given to thwarting his inclinations, or doing violence to his feelings. They may talk of the noble-minded patriot—Lord Albert, for instance—sacrificing his time, his health, his domestic enjoyments for his country's good. Pshaw! Can you imagine that if the life he leads 'bored' him, as these fine gentlemen call it, for a single moment, he would not put down blue-books and *portefeuilles*, and be away to the mode of existence more congenial to his tastes?"

"Undoubtedly he would," was Santland's mental commentary on his own written words; "and if I had still upon me the curse of passions which, as we are taught to believe, God only gave us to be fought against—if I had still within me, warring against the weaker spirit, those fleshy demons now extinct for ever, should I be living here an anchoritish life—a life which probably the world is kind enough to praise, as one of virtuous and holy self-denial?"

He passed his hand across his forehead, as if to chase away the train of thought which crowded onwards, and was about to proceed with his letter, when a loud ring at the door-bell resounded through the house.

“An important visitor,” said the Rector to himself. “Half-past eleven, too—I wonder who is so unconscionable as to need a soul’s physician at this unseemly hour;” and then—for Jane the footwoman (as he styled her) had long since retired to rest,—Santland proceeded without further delay to unclosethe fastenings of the door and parley with his visitor.

The latter was not a ceremonious individual, as his noisy summons had already demonstrated, and the moment that ingress was possible, he (for, as Santland had concluded, the bell had been rung by no female hand) rushed past the Rector into the passage.

“Stop!” exclaimed the latter, “and tell me first your name, and what you want with me.”

“My name is Joseph Hannum; and I am come for justice—justice on a villain who has robbed me of my daughter.”

Santland made no reply to the excited man, but taking him gently by the arm led him to the

private study, and shut the door softly upon himself and his unexpected guest.

"Sit down," he said, "and calm yourself—there—anywhere you like," he added, for he saw that, agitated though he was, the sight of the superior wealth and comfort round him was causing his visitor to feel anything but at his ease.

"Sir," began the working-man, hesitatingly, "I wouldn't have troubled you, only——"

"Trouble, man—what is trouble? You were speaking of your daughter—saying you had lost her. Talk to me as man to man, and tell me if it is in my power to serve you."

But even when assisted by this kind encouragement, and rendered almost eloquent by the depth and strength of the wild tumult of excitement surging up within him, Hannum found it hard enough to tell his bitter story. Happily for him, however, his auditor was one of those who with half words can make up comprehensible sentences, so that no length of time elapsed before Santland was fully aware of the misfortune which had befallen the gardener's family.

For one short minute after the tale was told he left the miserable man alone, and then returning with a decanter and a glass, he poured

into the latter some rich cordial wine, and bade the ill-used father drink it.

"You are cold, man; and the wine will do you good; drink it, and then we'll talk of business."

Hannum, on the Rector's invitation, rose from his chair—even at that trying moment he did not forget his "manners," and lifting the glass to his lips with his rough horny fingers, said respectfully—

"Here's your good health, sir, and your young lady's."

"That's right, my man," said Mr. Santland, encouragingly, when Hannum, after swallowing the warming liquor with great apparent relish, replaced the empty glass upon the table, and wiped his lips with the back of his broad hand. "That's right, and now sit down again, and answer me a question I shall put to you. Is your love for pretty little Annie, or your hatred to young Matthew Fendall, strongest?"

"Sir?" said the man, not seeing the inference.

"Well! I'll put it plainer. Is it your first wish to find your daughter and to make her happier?"

"I should like to foight that fellow first," said Joseph, moodily.

"I daresay you would—I can quite understand that—but you see that it is impossible."

"Great folks does it, when their daughters is ruined."

"But their daughters are not ruined; little scrapes are got into sometimes, possibly, and got out of without scandal. '*Noblesse oblige*,'" muttered Santland to himself, and then aloud, "You see, my poor fellow, that what you call great folks haven't so many temptations as little ones. Your poor little girl, if she had been a lady, could not well have met a handsome gentleman alone, and——"

Poor Joseph groaned aloud—"Darn him!" he cried; "but I'll have the heart out of him—I'll——"

"You'll do no such thing, but you'll just take my advice, and for your daughter's sake keep quiet."

"There's not much hope of quiet," said Hannum sadly, "with my woman's tongue at home a'going like a bell clapper, with her aggravating 'I told you this,' and 'I told you that'; and then the neighbours must know it all—bad luck to them with their gossiping, and their wondering what's taken Annie Hannum away on a sudden like. Oh, sir, I never can bear it, and I shall

just go and hide my head where I shall never see one of their darned faces any more."

"Don't do anything in a hurry," said the Rector soothingly. "Wait till I've seen Sir Matthew, who will I am sure do everything in his power to remedy this evil—and——"

"He's very good for a high-up gentleman," broke in the under-gardener, whose misery was evidently rapidly inoculating him with notions as new as they were democratic. "But, sir, I won't take their money. You'll be so good, sir, as tell Sir Matthew I won't take their money."

"Nobody wants you to, you foolish man," said Santland, good humouredly. "And now give me Annie's letter—it's a very pretty one, as pretty as herself, and will touch Sir Matthew's feelings when he reads it."

Hannum turned to go, but so reluctantly, that Mr. Santland saw at a glance that the main purpose of his visit yet remained unfulfilled. He walked with heavy footsteps to the door, and there paused, with his fingers on the handle. It was the delay of a moment, and then turning slowly round, and speaking with great and evident effort, he muttered, rather than said :

"He should be made to marry her, the cussed young villain! Will you be pleased to say that

to Sir Matthew, and I'll be very thankful, and recollect your reverence in my prayers ? ”

He was gone before the Rector could reply, and fortunately without hearing the low Mephistophiles-like laugh which quivered on the thin lips of his late adviser.

“Poor fellow ! And poor helpless girl ! ” was the mute comment of the once more lonely watcher, when that singular expression of a feeling which was anything but merriment had subsided. “And Shirly can find it in his heart to mourn over the asceticism, as he calls it, of that cub at Oxford, recommending him, forsooth, a course of pleasure and amusement. Pleasure and amusement ! Strife and sorrow ! Ah me ! The troubles of that unhappy man will drive away my best companion, sleep, and I must try a dose of Sherlock’s sermons—a double, treble dose of that invaluable opiate—to counteract the evil effects of this disturbing visit.”

And having so resolved, he once more drew his paper towards him, and the scratching of his pen along its surface was again heard breaking on the solemn stillness of the night.

CHAPTER XVII.

SIR MATTHEW'S RESOLUTION.

IF there existed a man of his class and degree capable of taking a serious view of the suggestion wrung from poor Hannum by his sense of injury, that man was Sir Matthew Fendall. The reader need scarcely again be told that a quiet, unpretending rectitude, joined to simple tastes and long-indulged habits of retirement, rendered the owner of Hazel Combe incapable of acting on the dictates of worldly wisdom alone. That he entertained some of the prejudices peculiar to his class cannot be denied, and such prejudices are apt to cling as closely to those who have unfortunately imbibed them, as do the features transmitted from generation to generation in a gallery of ancient family portraits. Nevertheless, impressed as was Sir Matthew with the expediency of handing down to posterity in all its unblemished purity the time-honoured race of Fendalls, this *felt*, rather

than expressed, ambition faded into nothingness on learning the glaring wrong which, through his son's instrumentality, had been inflicted on the gardener's daughter.

The Rector, faithful to his promise, had lost no time in performing the painful duty which had devolved upon him, namely, that of informing the excellent Sir Matthew of the young soldier's delinquency; but he was both dismayed and surprised to find how keenly the father felt the disgrace which, according to *his* view of the affair, Mat had brought upon himself and his family.

"I can scarcely understand it, Mr. Santland," he said, in a tone of deep despondency. "If I had kept that boy at home, my friends would all have said that I was accountable by so doing for his want of self-control, and for what I greatly fear must be called his vices. I took the advice of others older and more experienced than myself; he went to a public school, and now we see the consequences."

"You are judging of a system from the one solitary instance of its failure which has come under your own observation," said Mr. Santland; "but I have little doubt that, could the subject be properly investigated, the numbers of

young gentleman who have improperly conducted themselves, would not, were we to strike an average between public and private education, be found greatly at variance. Matthew is nineteen, and an elder son; a conjunction of circumstances which in my opinion is very conducive to getting into scrapes. No, believe me, Sir Matthew, that you have in this instance nothing with which to reproach yourself, and that you may——”

“She is a good girl,” broke in Sir Matthew, who was too much agitated to listen calmly, “and thoroughly well conducted—at least, I have heard so; and the family have lived on the estate for years! Mr. Santland, I cannot throw off my responsibility in this matter. My tenants are, and should be, my especial care, and if you can assure me that this poor girl’s character is irreproachable——”

“Excellent. I never heard her spoken of but in terms of praise; *now*, however, of course all that will be changed; for poor Annie has made a mistake which will entail upon her many a disdainful word and look, while the finger of scorn will be pointed at her till she turns away heart-sick from the sight.”

“This shall not be, by Heaven!” exclaimed

Sir Matthew, with a vehemence wholly unusual with him; and striking his clenched hand upon the table, he spread out his broad chest as though in defiance of little Annie's enemies. "They shall not, for Matthew shall bring her to this house a bride, and then let the man or woman who will dare to breathe a syllable against my daughter-in-law, say the base words to me, and I will answer them."

"But Lady Fendall—my dear Sir Matthew! ——" began Mr. Santland.

"My mother will, I trust, think with me on this occasion; but if she should differ from me in opinion, I must not allow even her wishes to turn me from the path to which honour and justice so clearly point. But, Mr. Santland, you say that this poor girl has left her father's house; let her be sought for—take this money ——"

"The man bade me say he would reject such payment."

"Tush! he will feel differently when he knows that we are more than willing to make such reparation as lies in our power. And I will write to Matthew; but you do not think—Eh! Mr. Santland—you have no reason to suppose that there will be any difficulty in

obtaining my son's consent to the measure I propose?"

It was rather an awkward question for the Rector to answer positively; for in truth he did feel considerable doubts as to the probability of Master Mat's consent to his father's arrangement. He knew well that the thicker and the softer is the bed of roses spread for an elder son, the less is he prepared to find a sting lying hidden amongst the flowers. Besides, early habits of indulgence had made young Matthew not a little selfish, whilst a natural poverty of reasoning powers, unevenly balanced by a weighty share of vanity, were likely to render him morbidly fearful of the ridicule which, after the enforced act of reparation, would probably be showered upon him by his thoughtless companions.

Such were among Santland's thoughts when Sir Matthew said, by way of delicately prompting a reply—

"If it were Johnnie, now, I should be certain what his conduct would be."

"It is a dilemma, my dear sir, on the horns of which Mr. Fendall would have been very little likely to place himself," said Mr. Santland. "Respectability is a matter of temperament—

and—and of position. Every one bows the knee to that last-named Baal of the age. Find me ten righteous men of your acquaintance who do not, and I will plead for charity and forgiveness for the millions who, in the monstrous Sodoms and Gomorrahs of the world, do ceaseless homage before the great grinning god of their idolatry.”

Sir Matthew did not always comprehend Mr. Santland, and often, when he did, he strove to close the ears of his understanding to the fact that the man whose intellect he so admired, and whose companionship was so infinitely agreeable, not unfrequently gave utterance to sentiments which, to Sir Matthew’s simple mind, seemed bordering on the reckless and the profane. On the present occasion, besides that he had much on which to consult the friend whose advice he had often found so useful, he deemed it inexpedient to enter on the subject just mooted by the Rector, in a manner which Sir Matthew half feared partook somewhat of irreverence.

“Johnnie is a good lad, I think and hope,” he said, after a pause, during which his thoughts had wandered principally to the younger son, whose conduct had hitherto been without reproach, and whose two years of Oxford life

had been unmarked by any of the irregularities which for many preceding months had caused the young dragoon to be a source of anxiety to the parent whose own existence had been passed so sinlessly. "I think and hope that Johnnie's principles are too well fixed for—— Ah, what is it, Jennings?" he said, addressing a middle-aged woman who, with a white, frightened face, and a manner which she evidently endeavoured to render composed, made her sudden appearance at the door. "What is it, Jennings? Nothing the matter, I hope?"

"No, Sir Matthew—only my mistress—her ladyship is not quite well—perhaps you'd have the goodness, Sir Matthew, just to step upstairs and see her ladyship yourself."

And Sir Matthew *did* step upstairs, and after the delay of a minute or two (a period which was spent by Santland in following with his eyes the proceedings of a lively robin, as in the sunlit garden it flitted from tree to tree), a noise of hurrying footsteps was heard echoing through the house; and presently the same woman—she was Lady Fendall's maid—returning hastily, said—

"Sir, will you please go up and see my mistress? Sir Matthew seems to think she's very

ill, and I believe—indeed I do—her ladyship's a-dying fast."

There were tears in the woman's voice, and a trembling over her limbs, for all she said aloud the terrible word, which in the higher ranks (those ranks in which good manners joined to good feeling lead to so many lies) would have been kept back as an expression all unfit for ears polite.

Mr. Santland was greatly shocked. It was but the day before that he and the now stricken lady had walked together through the green shrubberies leading from the Rectory to the Combe, after the morning service in the small Combe Hatton church was over. Lady Fendall had seemed "so careful and troubled" about all worldly matters then—"careful and troubled," as though—good woman though she was—she had forgotten that full fourscore years had rolled above her head! White was the driven snow, which lay so thick and soft upon the shining laurel leaves, but whiter still was the neat line of hair which lay across the yet smooth brow of good Sir Matthew's mother; and yet, for all the warnings that her lease of life was drawing to a close, the worthy lady spoke as though the Reaper's scythe would pass her by untouched,

and that, in the bosom of Him who bindeth up the sheaves, she would find no place.

"Is she so very ill? When was she taken?" asked the Rector, as he followed Mrs. Jennings up the broad oaken stairs, and into Lady Fendall's morning room.

It was curious how delicately they trod, and in what low hushed tones they whispered to each other! Were they afraid that she would hear them? Or was it that a trembling awe of a more dreaded presence kept them mute the while they ministered to the motionless and unconscious woman?

He had no fear—at least, he thought not—that anointed man of God—of the last enemy to be overcome—the last sting to be inflicted in the doomed mortal sent for the short moment of a human life to breathe, to suffer, and to die; and yet even he was awed, as standing by that aged woman's side he felt the chilling fluttering of the great Angel's wings, and *knew* that man, with all his boasted reason, is powerless and lowly as the worm that will feed upon his decaying flesh, or as the dust from which he sprung and will return to, when beneath the coffin-lid his body will be hid from human eyes for ever.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONSULTATION.—NEWS OF ANNIE.

LADY FENDALL remained for many days in a state of apparently total unconsciousness—a state in which all the functions of the brain appeared to be suspended, and the soul——Ah! where—as Santland for ever asked himself—where was the living principle which we hope is inextinguishable within us, the while the perishable body lay, a still breathing and existing thing, stretched upon what seemed to be its bed of death?

For many days, then, as I have said, the excellent old lady lay still and motionless—a curious, though painful, study to the philosopher who watched the faint breath as it came from that withered body; and presenting a sight so harrowing to the feelings of Sir Matthew, that he forgot for awhile the anxiety which his son had caused him, and ceased to remember the wrongs and sufferings of the gardener's daughter.

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The illness of so important a personage as the influential and ever-busy Lady Fendall caused no little stir and sensation in the neighbourhood. She had lived amongst those quiet country-people for the better—aye, much the better part of a century; and had grown so old whilst performing her self-imposed duties of general adviser and active friend to all who might stand in need of help, that they had never regarded her as one whose lamp of life was burning low, and whose pilgrim's staff was leaned on heavily, because of the eighty winters which had blanched her aged head.

Poor Sir Matthew quite lost his presence of mind and courage under the shock of his mother's totally unexpected seizure; and the servants—old retainers of the family—as they saw him wringing his hands and hanging helplessly over the couch on which the aged lady had been placed, felt alarmed at the intensity of his sorrow, and entreated the Rector to remain at Hazel Combe till some change should take place in the condition of their mistress.

It was a trial to the recluse to abandon, even for a few hours, the quiet seclusion of his home; and he was on the point of suggesting that more fitting sympathisers in Sir Matthew's

distress would be found at Westerham Abbey, and among his deceased wife's relations, when a mute appeal from the grief-stricken countenance of Sir Matthew himself caused a change in his purpose, and he remained to sympathise where he could not hope to aid.

On the first alarm of Lady Fendall's seizure, both her grandsons had been hastily summoned to Hazel Combe: it was only, however, by the younger that the unexpected call could be obeyed, for Matthew's regiment had received sudden orders to embark for India, whence the notes of coming war had sounded; and in such a case—at least so wrote the young lieutenant—even the plea of severe domestic affliction could not be urged as an excuse for absenting himself from duty.

“Dear old Grannie!” said the more tender-hearted and home-loving Johnnie, when, after gazing long and mournfully on the venerable face which lay so white and meaningless upon the pillow, he joined Mr. Santland in the library—“Dear old Grannie! Is there any hope that she will rally, Mr. Santland, if only for an hour—only to say good-bye to us?”

“Rally! So you would have the old lady revive to a state of painful consciousness for

your satisfaction, and in order that you and your father may know whether, during the past eight-and-forty hours, Lady Fendall has been thinking over the arrangements of her funeral, and settling in which corner of the family-vault it will best suit her to be laid ? ”

“ But,” said Johnnie, who felt a good deal shocked by the Rector’s unsympathising tone—“ but she may have last words to say—last directions to give, and——”

“ Very likely. We have all last words to say, last directions to give, before we take a long journey ; and how much the more before setting forth on that last expedition from which we shall return no more ! Johnnie, my dear boy,” he added, kindly, as he laid his hand upon the young man’s shoulder, “ do not wish for your dying grandmother that, at the eleventh hour, she should be aroused from the heavy slumber into which she has fallen. For more than threescore years and ten she has lived a blameless life upon the earth ; in Heaven’s name, then, let us not grudge her the exceeding great reward of dying without a pang, either of the flesh or of the spirit—with no regrets for those she is leaving behind her, and no fears of the unknown future which stretches wide and dark before us all ! ”

So spoke the Rector of Combe Hatton, the while that docile young disciple sat at his Gamaliel's feet, and listened as to an oracle. But, decisively and authoritatively as he uttered his words of counsel, Mr. Santland was in reality sharing to the full in the desire expressed by his pupil for a restoration of Lady Fendall's mental powers—hoping with all his heart that the feeble fire might again show symptoms of vitality, and that she might once more “speak with her tongue:” for the sceptical and ever-reasoning man longed, with even a feverish desire, for some communication with a spirit which had so long been hovering on the confines of that mysterious world, of whose strange secrets even the wisest amongst us are as ignorant as the infant into whose nostrils the first faint breath of life has just been breathed.

But whilst the unconscious lady's sorrowing grandson and her valued clerical friend were thus—the one openly, and the other in secret—keenly desiring her resuscitation, Sir Matthew was leaving no earthly means untried to restore the blessings of life and health to his much-loved parent. As a means to that end, two mighty physicians, autocrats in their line of business, had been sent for post-haste from London; and

at the very moment when Santland and his quondam pupil were gloomily brooding over her mental prospects, they, in the large deserted drawing-room, were consulting solemnly together concerning the bodily condition of their patient.

An awfully serious affair, in truth, was that discussion concerning the life or death of one who had arrived (even as the Rector had remarked) at the age when a mortal being's strength is but labour and sorrow, and the waves of whose existence were ebbing away so peacefully, that it seemed scarcely well to wish for their reflux against the rocks and breakers of earth's troubled shore.

It was at the suggestion of Mr. James (the son and successor of the family apothecary in the mahogany topboots, who had considered himself amply competent to his duties as medical attendant of the Hazel Combe family) that further advice had been called in on the occasion of Lady Fendall's illness. He was a timid man was the humble village doctor; and his wife—who had made him the father of a long family of sons and daughters, ever clamouring for beef and bread, shoes, clothing, and education—was, if possible, still more fearful of the responsibility which a sole and unaided attendance on so great

a lady as Dame Elizabeth Fendall of Hazel Combe entailed upon him.

"You know, James, if she should die after taking your medicines," was the careful wife's remark to the weary man, who had passed the night by the stricken lady's side, "how dreadful it would be!"

"She can't swallow *any* medicines—good, bad, or indifferent," said the apothecary, shortly; for he was a little out of temper, partly owing to fatigue, but not a little to the disturbance and anxiety of his mind: for, to tell the truth, he also nourished a strong objection to Lady Fendall's dying on his hands, although the idea of requiring any foreign assistance and aid in the difficult duty of keeping her alive, was as mortifying to his pride as the reality was likely to be detrimental to his pecuniary interests.

"For,"—so he reasoned within himself, and indeed he imparted the result of his cogitations to his wife, when a calmer state of feeling had supervened, and he could discuss the knotty question rationally—"For it is natural to suppose that by the time Sir Matthew will have paid those cormorants" (the poor man was very bitter against the successful London practitioners)—"by the time Sir Matthew will have forked out their

exorbitant fees, there won't be much left for me—we may take our 'davy of that, Keziah. And besides, the old lady won't die—not a bit of it. She has the constitution of a horse, or an ostrich; and directly she comes round, those fellows”—(Fellows, indeed! Fancy calling Sir Theodoric, with his great grey head and his big oratorical voice, a “fellow!” As well might he have stigmatised the first gentleman in the land as a snob, or the reigning countess as a lady of pleasure)—“yes, those fellows from London will get all the credit of curing Lady Fendall of Hazel Combe. Just think of that, Mrs. James! Lady Fendall of Hazel Combe cured of a mortal disorder by two eminent London physicians; whilst I, who have attended the family for years—as my father and grandfather did before me—will have to play second-fiddle, or rather”—he added, with a grim attempt at facetiousness—“*third-fiddle*, in a case where my professional reputation is at stake.”

“To say nothing of the children's bread,” put in Mrs. James, with the kind of sigh common to mothers of families with whom the demand for food and clothing is habitually far greater than the supply.

But, although Mr. James had made up his

mind—not without a painful effort—to the mortification of playing a very minor part in the concert of medical voices about to be performed at Hazel Combe, he was, nevertheless, by no means prepared for the reality of having no “fiddle” to play at all: for Sir Theodoric and Doctor Lentil Lomax put him aside at once, scarcely deigning, as he afterwards complained to his sympathising better-half, to listen to his account of Lady Fendall’s seizure, or hear his descriptive details of her ladyship’s constitution.

“They put me on one side at once,” said the illused man; “and then they went bowing and scraping and ceremonising out of the room—‘After you, Dr. Lomax,’ and ‘I couldn’t think of it, Sir Theodoric’—Ugh! the old fools!”

“But will they do the poor old lady any good?” inquired Mrs. James.

“Good! Not they! Said her feet were to be put in mustard, and that she was to take—*take*, indeed! when she’s lying like a corpse!—beef-tea every two hours! ‘With a little salt in it, Sir Theodoric?’ I asked; and let me tell you they were about the first words I had contrived to get in edgeways—‘A leetle salt, Sir Theodoric?’ He looked at me as if he’d eat me, and then, turning himself round to Dr.

Lomax (who is a tall, chattering, white-haired man), said solemnly, ‘What do you think, Dr. Lomax? Is it your opinion that a little salt may be exhibited?’ ‘Salt; oh yes, Sir Theodoric: a very little—just a *soupsou*’—that was his word. ‘And now, Mr. Jones’—‘James, I beg your pardon, sir,’ from me—‘Well, James then, you will see to these directions being carried out; a little salt, you understand, in Lady Fendall’s soup, according to Sir Theodoric’s suggestion.’ And then he began, in his offhand way, to question me about the possessions of the Fendall family—how much they had a year, what Lady Fendall would leave after her, and a host of other things, about which he ought to have troubled himself as little as our Betty concerning the gallipots in the surgery.”

“He must be a very inquisitive old man,” suggested Mrs. James.

“Old man, indeed! Old woman, you should say. Ugh! to think of great people being humbugged by such quacks as those. Give me my slippers, Keziah, and a hot tumbler. Heigh ho!” And in a few minutes the illused apothecary was snoring comfortably over the last number of the “Lancet,” to which interesting publication (to the infinite disgust of his wife, who

would have preferred "Le Follet," or, at any rate, a stray number of the "Satirist") the worthy man insisted on subscribing.

But long as had been Lady Fendall's lease of life, and close to its expiration as all around her had deemed it, there seemed at last a probability of its being once more renewed; for the day arrived when the old lady turned round slowly in her bed, and faintly, and in an altered voice, murmured the name of "Matthew."

To describe how joyfully her son hailed this apparent resurrection would be as impossible as it would be tedious to detail the manner in which, by night as well as by day, he devoted himself to the mother whose affection through life had never failed him. Very tenderly was the hand of filial love held round the flickering flame, lest a stronger blast than it had strength to contend against should extinguish the feeble breath of life, and leave the man of fifty, who was still in heart a child, motherless and alone. For, attached as Sir Matthew was to the two sons who had now grown up to manhood, and *kindly* as they reciprocated his affection, there was in the characters of both (dissimilar as those characters were) so little to harmonise with his own, that poor Sir Matthew, feeling, though in nowise

capable of analysing, the line which had been drawn between him and his Janetta's children, turned for companionship to the aged parent by whose strong intellect he had so long been guided, and whose simple tastes and old-world ways were so congenial to his own.

But as the faint hues of returning vitality gradually spread over the ancient lady's wrinkled face, it became painfully evident that, even for that son of quiet habits, whose veneration for his mother's powers of mind had become, from long custom, part and parcel of his being, Lady Fendall could no longer fill the office either of companion or adviser. It was long ere Sir Matthew could be convinced that the strong intellect he had revered had failed and faded, like the leaves of autumn shaken by the winds of night—long, too, ere he could grow accustomed to play the part of protector to her on whose judgment he had relied, and without whose counsels he was as a rudderless ship, floating on the smoothly-running current of his uneventful life.

Uneventful, indeed, it had been since the day when his Janetta had left him to pursue alone that cheerless voyage—uneventful, till the great shock came of his eldest son's lapse from virtue

and from honour, the sad intelligence of which heavy misfortune his old friend the Rector had deemed it his duty to convey to the unworld-taught father's ears.

But, quick upon that stunning blow came, as we have seen, the sudden illness of the venerable grandmother, to whose overweening indulgence of her favourite grandson it might in part be owing that Matthew the "bold dragoon," in whose good looks and dashing manliness she took such infinite delight, placed no curb upon his passions, and mowed down, with all an eldest son's reckless selfishness, the obstacles which stood in the way of their indulgence.

It had, as we have seen, been the first impulse of the good Christian, whose ideas of honour were fixed at a higher standard than those which guide (and sometimes guide so erringly) the children of the world, that Matthew should, on pain of his heaviest displeasure (a penalty of which it is probable the dragoon would not stand much in awe), make such reparation as lay in his power to the humble village maiden, whose loveliness had been a snare to lead her into evil. But kind man as he was, good neighbour and most honest gentleman, Sir Matthew was in some sort selfish; and, engrossed by his own absorbing

cares, he forgot, by the bedside of his apparently-dying parent, the unprotected being whose cause he had at first so warmly espoused.

The days glided unnoticed by, and grew into unheeded weeks, before the sorrowing son remembered that he had other duties to perform in life than those which the helplessness of his enfeebled parent entailed upon him. Then he bethought him of the humbler sufferer who had appealed to him in his sore distress, and he made tardy inquiries after Joseph Hannum and the daughter who had wandered away in her shame, none could tell whither!

The answer to the inquiries of the conscience-smitten landlord was soon brought to him; and it was one which brimmed his cup of sorrow and self-reproach: "The Hannums had left the cottage, one and all, several weeks ago; and it was said—no one knew for certain—that Annie Hannum had put an end to herself (it was a shocking business, surely! over one of the Lunnon bridges, in the night-time, when there was nobody by to take her out, poor soul, living or dead!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE.

“Is it alive?”

“God knows! It doesn’t breathe. But take it gently, woman. It didn’t kill *itself*, poor thing!”

The latter remark might have been spared by the woman who uttered it, seeing that the “thing” was only a small infant of ten minutes old, the which unpleasant-looking specimen of humanity was covered with a grey-white skin, and had a purplish mark about its tiny throat.

“You great fool,” said the woman who held the new-born infant in her arms, and was examining it curiously—“you great fool, you! I never said it did.”

“Nor I, my dear; only, considering its misfortins, it might be brought in justifiable ’omicide supposing as it ’ad. P’raps it’ll come to, who knows? You give it me, and I’ll be a-blowing into its nostrils when the doctor comes.”

"Blow into its nostrils indeed, with a pint of gin in your breath! Go along to bed with you, do! I've had a precious deal too much of worretting already with the girl upstairs; and you'll be only in the way when the doctor and the policemen come."

"I won't have no policemen in the house," began the man, who, together with his wife, kept a small pawnbroker's shop in Dudley-street, Soho.

"You won't? You'd better, or they'll be ready enough to swear we had a 'and in it, when Lor' knows I didn't know the girl from Adam till yesterday was a week."

But whilst Mr. and Mrs. Bennett are settling their dispute in the parlour behind the shop, we will conduct our readers to a small close room, two storeys higher, in which lay the unhappy young woman who had just given birth to a baby, under circumstances which might certainly, to say the least of them, be called untoward.

She was stretched upon a low truckle-bed, and was wailing feebly, while her head moved restlessly upon the pillow, over which masses of dishevelled auburn hair were streaming in picturesque but uncomfortable confusion.

A woman, clad in a dirty gown and cap, was

standing near, saying a word or two from time to time, but receiving not a single word in answer. The girl's blue eyes were opened widely—opened with that strange and startling distension which makes us think of death, while wondering that the human form to which such eyes belong should not be still and motionless. The woman who stood over the suffering creature had come in haste, hearing that a crime had been committed by the lodger at the Bennett's, to see the perpetrator of that unnatural offence. She came to rail, perhaps to scoff, at the offender ; but she remained to pity (nay, who can tell?—*that* door once opened leads to so much of good), perhaps to pray beside a poor and dying sinner!

“ Sure, dear,” she whispered, as she stroked the hair back from the low white brow, damp with the dews of her past agony—“ Sure, dear, you didn't mean it—did you, now? The little innocent—your very own blessed babby ! ”

There was no answer, even by a look, to the woman's half-curious, half-sympathising appeal ; for Annie Hannum's brain (the reader has already guessed the name of that poor young desolate one) was wandering—Heaven help her !—amongst frenzied visions, in which reality had no more place than charity for such poor fallen

things as she who lay there, on that bright spring day, so friendless and forlorn.

"She's dying, Mrs. Bennett, sure as I stand here to-day," whispered the neighbour to the pawnbroker's wife, who came to announce the arrival of the doctor. "She's dying, and not a word to say who she is, nor nothink."

She would have talked on thus for hours, the worthy gossip, but for the entrance of the medical man—that omnipotent sovereign in the dreariest of all dominions, the chamber of the sick—and for the stern order for instant silence which he gave.

He was quite a young man, tall, thin, and hollow-chested, with a cavernous voice, and a complexion which told that consumption had marked him for her own. For the space of several minutes he kept his gaze fixed on the girl's wild eyes and heated face; then he laid his hand gently on her forehead, and counted the beatings of her throbbing pulses.

"You must take care of her," he said; "she is very ill."

"Not a-going to die, sir, I 'ope?" asked Mrs. Bennett, who was too much excited by the dreary nature of the occasion to attend to the proper regulation of her voice, which was high-pitched

and almost querulous. "A death in the 'ouse would be very illconvenient, and——"

"Hush!" said the Doctor, whose lancet was in his hand, and whose measures for the relief of the patient were already commenced,—"Hush! she may recover. She is young, and we must not thus early abandon hope;" saying which, he directed the not unkindly woman to lay bare the smooth white arm which moved so restlessly on the patchwork coverlid.

The operation was soon performed, and the blood flowed freely from the bared limb; but when the last drop had trickled from the bound-up wound, poor Annie lay so white and motionless, that all who looked on her half feared that she was already—

"Taking her fill
Of deep and quiet rest, forgetful of all ill."

"Has the poor girl any friends? Do you know anything of her family?" asked the young doctor, after he had dismissed the policeman, with an assurance that it was no case for the law's interference.

Mrs. Bennett looked confused.

"I am sorry to say as I do not, sir," she replied. "The young woman came and asked

for an apartment, seeing a bill up, as I suppose, which it isn't my 'abit to let to chance people ; but I was took like with her looks, and——”

“ Had she any money ? ” inquired the doctor, cutting short this rapid flow of unasked-for information.

“ She had, sir—several pounds,” was the reply, for Mrs. Bennett was not a dishonest woman on the whole ; although no fact could be more indisputable than that, had poor Annie Hannum been possessed of no bright sovereigns to display before the eager eyes of the pawn-broker's wife, the unhappy girl might have found beneath the dismal bridge of sighs a more lasting resting-place than the one afforded her at No.—, Dudley Street, Soho.

“ Poor girl ! ” ejaculated the surgeon, pityingly. He was busy with the baby, who had shown signs of life, and was now lying wrapped in flannel on the neighbour's ample lap.

“ Yes, sir ; and poor babby too, says I. The blessed crittur, to be sent out of the world before its time, with a string round its neck—the 'artless hussey ! ”

There was evidently a reaction in favour of the baby, and against the author not only of its being, but (as the gossips inferred) of its intended death.

“You are making a great mistake,” said the Doctor, mildly; “for this infant has not been unfairly dealt with, nor was there, apparently, any attempt at concealment of its birth since, from what I can learn, the unfortunate young woman upstairs had brought with her the clothes necessary for her child when it should come into the world. She is now in a high fever, and her life hangs upon a thread. I trust I need not warn you to be careful of her. Do not let her want for care and nursing, and above all let there be as much stillness as you can command in the house, and in her room.”

The orders given by the young surgeon were punctually obeyed, and the gardener's daughter (truly it seemed a doubtful mercy!) was brought back from the portals of death, to learn that she was the mother of a son, than whom an orphan's lot would have been far less pitiable and forlorn. Her medical attendant had watched the case with anxious solicitude. He could afford to be lavish of his time, for the “thriving practice” which he had purchased with half of his small capital had turned out a failure; or it might be that “Doctor” Black was too young, or too sickly-looking, to be popular in his profession. Perhaps also (for

he was deplorably deficient in self-assumption) he had neglected some of the arts, legitimate or otherwise, failing the exercise of which success—in the ever-struggling crowd of an intriguing world—is rarely to be arrived at. The toiling man, however, was far from destitute of natural talent, and he possessed, moreover, a proud independence of character, which would have been accounted admirable in an unpolished Highland chieftain, but which, when exhibited by the son of a small landed gentleman in the heart of the Cheviots, who boasted no nobler-sounding patronymic than “Black,” was of course as ridiculous as it was misplaced.

As the reader will readily believe, the beauty of his new patient did not absolutely count for nothing in the sum of unanalyzed motives which induced Alexander Black to devote so much of his time and attention towards her recovery. He saw that she was very fair, and he thought, despite the absence of matrimony’s symbol on the little girlish hand, that she was *pure*. So, when poor Annie showed symptoms of returning interest in surrounding objects, the doctor looked curiously for proofs that his conjectures—born of those fallacious things, first impressions

—had not wholly led him astray regarding her.

And first of all he questioned the young mother (who blushed so self-accusingly over the infant that nestled in her bosom) regarding her birth and parentage, and of the friends on whom she might still reckon in her distress.

He did not pry into the cause of her lying there—so young and fair and unprotected: for his desire for information was tempered by an inborn delicacy which prompted him to spare the evidently sensitive creature, who, so far from glorying in her “shame,” shrank with such evident pain from the slightest handling of her sore mental wounds.

“I shouldn’t like father to know where I was ’biding, sir,” she said one day to the surgeon, who daily gained more of her confidence and grateful regard. “I wouldn’t wish that he should hear of me; but I should like to see Mary—dear Mary, and the children. They would be proud of my poor little baby. Do you think it will live, sir? It looks so weak sometimes, and delicate-like.”

Dr. Black—he was always called “Doctor” at the pawnbroker’s—reassured her as regarded the chances of her infant’s lease of life, but

whether likely to be long or short he did not commit himself by saying: and then, with his mind full of a design which he had but that moment formed, he proceeded to put his purpose into execution.

CHAPTER XX.

A LOST FAMILY.

JOSEPH HANNUM was not far wrong when he prophesied that his wife's and his neighbours' tongues together would make not only the village of Westerton, wherein he dwelt, but even the town of Hillingstone, too hot to hold him. Mrs. Hannum felt deeply both the loss of her pretty docile daughter, and the disgrace which had been brought upon her house ; but sorrow, with the busy mother of that large and trying family, did not take an amiable or sympathising turn ; and Joseph, far from finding a comforter in the wife of his bosom, was after awhile so exasperated by her clamorous lamentations, that he rushed, almost for the first time in his life, to the alehouse, as a place of refuge from the intolerable weariness of his home.

There was no one to taunt him there—no one to upbraid him with his over-indulgence of the girl who had ill-repaid his kindness—no

one to say, "I always told you how it would be, and you have got but what you merit."

They were all good fellows—at least Joseph thought so—who met together in that snug parlour, with its sanded floor and well-fed fire, and who sang such jolly songs about their sweet-hearts and their ale-jugs. So the gardener spent the evening in that pleasant company, never returning till eleven o'clock had struck, and finding Mrs. Hannum, who had worked hard all day, in anything but a placid frame of mind.

The next morning, when the rustic delinquent opened his eyes, he felt sick, sheepish, and ashamed. So sheepish and ashamed indeed did he both feel and look, that Mrs. Hannum was down upon him at once; and the man, turning sulky under her rebukes, went forth again, and taking to himself other spirits more baneful than the first, they entered in and dwelt there evermore.

But the love of drink, which had thus tardily developed itself in the doomed man, produced even more disastrous consequences to the welfare of his family than angry words at home and loss of respect abroad; for soon the Westerham bailiff—who, like other subordinates in authority, was known (as the discontented were wont to

remark) "to have his favourites"—took advantage of Hannum's rapidly increasing foible, and with scant ceremony and preparation dismissed him from his employment at the Abbey.

It was then, and not till then, that the Hannums really knew how low in public estimation they had fallen; then, and not till then, that the wife and mother became aware how greatly she had been supported by the hypocritical consolation of the neighbours—who, infinitely to Joseph's annoyance, came about her daily, like busy bees as they were, laden with the honey of sympathising words, but leaving behind them the venomous stings whose poisons entered into her flesh, and wrought their evil in the after-time.

The poor woman bitterly bemoaned her fate when the hour for departure from the cottage struck, and no one save "Hannum's daughter," as she called the girl from the Upper Farm, came to bid them "God speed!" Mary strove in vain to induce her father to reveal his projects for the future, nor was she more successful when she endeavoured to exact from him a promise that he would write and let her know of his well-being.

"Thee'll hear soon enough, lass," he said, "if

there's any more harm to tell of us, and good I don't expect. I did think as how I should have heard something of Sir Matthew, but I suppose as it's Madam's illness as has put us and our misfortins out of his head. And folks do be saying that the cussed young chap is off to Ingy, so it's all over with us. Heigh ho ! büt it's a heavy time ! ”

Mary was going to say she knew it was, and to bid him take comfort, but he did not seem to hear, as he gave his directions for the going forth.

“ Say good-bye, Mary girl, and have done with it ; and wife, you call the others. What the dickens are you keeping staring at the old walls that way for ? Come Jenny, my woman, you come along with father. ”

It was a sad sight to see them go—the father, with his three-year-sold child within his arms, striving to look as though he felt no pang while turning his back upon his home for ever !

Of course their steps were turned towards London, partly perhaps to hide their heads the more effectually amongst the multitude, but more probably from the circumstance that Joseph shared in the popular but unaccountable belief, that in the Metropolis the demand for labourers

is infinitely greater than the supply, and that a workman from the country has only to present himself, and he will receive remunerative employment, without question and without delay.

That these hopes were at once proved to be fallacious was rather a matter of triumph to Mrs. Hannum, who had strongly objected to the migration northwards; for all her friends, she argued, were on the coast, and they were well-off people, who would not see her want. This was a favourite boast of the worthy woman, and one that was invariably forthcoming whenever any particular and more strongly-marked slight than usual, inflicted on her by the "Upper Farm people," called for an extra assumption on her part of dignity and self-importance.

But Joseph, much to his wife's displeasure, seemed very little impressed by the importance of her connections "on the coast"—an amount of incredulity by no means surprising, when we reflect that, for the twenty years of his married life, he had known them but by hearsay. Perhaps, however (and, considering the ways of the world, the supposition is not an improbable one), the "well-off" relations waited till they should see their humble belongings in want before they stepped in to their assistance. But, be this as it

may, and whether or not the gardener's wife had imparted to them the approaching change in her condition, certain it is that she was allowed to depart from the country where she had been bred and born without being harassed by any pressing invitations calculated to disturb her mind on an occasion so momentous.

Joseph, before his departure, turned—and this was another cause of quarrel—all his worldly possessions, excepting a few clothes, into money: and thus, in light marching-order, they set forth on their pilgrimage.

They were six in number: two sons—one of whom was an idiot, and the other big-headed and ungainly—and the pretty twins, for whom the father had still a kind word when he was sober: for Jenny—he was carrying her very carefully in his arms—was like his poor lost Annie, over whom the heart of the degraded man still yearned in bitterness of spirit.

They passed close by the little whitewashed church, and under the spreading yew whose branches stretched over the churchyard wall. There Mrs. Hannum, being behind for a moment, and leaning over the low fence, looked wistfully at four small graves on which the winter snow lay thick and white. She did not linger long,

but a close observer might have seen a few tears wiped from her eyes with her blue-checked pocket-handkerchief; and then she trudged on, all-unnoticed, after those children that remained to her.

There is no need to particularise the events which followed on the arrival of the family in the great city, where they had no friends, no recommendations, and of pounds but very few. They took a lodging in a crowded court, and then Joseph went out to look for work—but, alas! to look in vain; for in the first place, and this was the most common excuse of those to whom he applied for employment, they knew nothing whatever about him, and then came the unanswerable argument, that the ground was frozen up, and that he was no worse off than hundreds of others who, from the inclemency of the season, were reduced to beggary.

Perhaps he was not very persevering, and was too soon discouraged by the obstacles and refusals with which he was everywhere met. Then, too, his home was so very miserable!—the one room, dirty, close, and smoky—his wife's temper growing worse and worse, and the country roses on the cheeks of the twins visibly paling as day succeeded unto day. Was it to be

wondered at, then, that he would sometimes take a "drop" in a place that looked so much more cheerful, and that the "drops" should increase in strength and number as the necessity for diligence and sobriety grew more and more imperative?

The neighbours in the court—Mrs. Hannum could not exist without her daily gossip—made common cause against the "brute," who left his poor blessed wife and children to starve, while he besotted himself at the gin-shop. The intervention of these energetic upholders of the rights of women did not mend matters in the domestic establishment of the quondam gardener, and quarrels grew every day more violent and frequent. There was no Annie, now, to smooth away difficulties and soften down asperities. Nay, she was worse than absent, for her fault was ever-present; and the names by which that fault could by the least charitable be designated, were as so many watchwords for domestic strife in the mouth of the indignant matron, who dated all her misfortunes from the moment of poor Annie's downfall.

It was not long before the crowning evil of all made itself felt by the unhappy family; for money went for food and rent, whilst none was

coming in, and the wolf threatened not only to knock loudly at the door, but to seat himself at the board of the destitute ones.

It was at this crisis that the miserable mother, wrought upon by evil example and the desire to escape for awhile from the oppression of her sorrows, took, in her turn, the fatal "drop," and slept—it was a novel and questionable blessing—the dull and deadly sleep of intoxication. But when she, in her turn, opened her eyes to the consciousness of her degradation, it was not reproaches that were her portion, but blows—the first that Joseph, great as had often been his provocation, had ever showered upon the shoulders of his wife. He was mad and furious—mad himself with drink, and rendered furious by the sight of her helplessness.

For the first time in her life Mrs. Hannum knew what real and abject terror was; but with her terror there was mingled a wild but silent cry for vengeance. In the extremity of her distress she placed the little sobbing Jenny between herself and the infuriated man; and a blow—was it meant for her, or for the child, she could not tell—was dealt by his heavy hand, and fell with unbroken force on the child's upturned face. With a wild cry of pain she fell

into her mother's arms ; whilst the father, muttering imprecations on the uproar that they made, left them to their tears and lamentations.

Four-and-twenty hours had elapsed since the scene I have just recorded, when Hannum—sober, but half-stupid—returned to his neglected home. When he had left it, the sounds of hysterical screams were ringing in his ears, and exciting his passion to the utmost ; but now, all was very still, for it was early morning, scarcely more than four o'clock, and the neighbours were not yet astir.

He knocked at the door, and his summons was answered by a stranger, whom he pushed rudely past. But what was the sight which curdled the blood within his veins, and made his cheek so deadly white, as he stood beside the bed, and trembled in every limb and fibre ?

His wife—his drunken wife, as he had called her—lay there, very silent now ; but not more silent than the pretty blossoms, his little harmless twins, whose prattling voices were hushed and still for ever !

The story was soon told ; but Hannum did not seem to understand it, as he sat there with a strange, unmeaning smile upon his face. Mrs. Hannum had gone out, the neighbours said,

soon after daybreak, and had taken the little children with her. All day they had wondered at her absence; but when night came, she had been brought home—she and the children—drowned!

Yes, it was too true that the frantic woman—frantic with gin, with passion, and a mad desire to avenge her wrongs—had taken her own life and that of her unoffending children! She had waited till nightfall, and then, tying the little creatures tightly to her waist, she had thrown herself from the parapet of that dismal bridge whence so many desperate women have found a resting place in oblivion.

The act had been seen by a passer-by, who gave the alarm, but it was too late to save the perishing ones; and the sinning mother, with the innocent victims of her guilt, were brought to land, as we have seen, only to be laid—three disfigured corpses—before the eyes of him, who seemed alike deaf to the neighbours' reproaches, and ignorant of the terrible presence of Death in the room which he had so lately called his Home!

Happily unsuspecting was Annie of these sad events, though separated by scarcely a mile of streets from those she loved. The ruin of her

family was complete,—her mother and her little sisters dead, her father a raving lunatic in Bethlehem Hospital, and her brothers the inmates of a workhouse ; whilst Annie, lying with little Myles upon her bosom, was, for the present at least, spared all knowledge of the evils she had wrought.

CHAPTER XXI.

REALITY.

A VERY warm, and what is called an early spring, had succeeded to the long, relentless winter, which had passed for Annie Hannum as one long night of wakeful misery. She had left her father's cottage very low in hope and courage, but rich (at least she thought so) in worldly wealth—for there was a ten pound note in the letter waiting for her, one memorable day, at the Hillingstone post-office; and to Annie, the riches contained in that flimsy piece of paper seemed almost inexhaustible.

She had now been for more than a month an inmate of the wretched, sloping-roofed garret, let to her at no low rate per week by the pawn-broker and his thrifty wife. During that period, thanks to the protection of Dr. Black, and to her own possession of the magic ore which is all-powerful in the purchase of civility and respect, she had no occasion to complain of the

treatment she had received. But, as may very readily be believed, the humble secrets of the poor lodger's exchequer were well-known to her, who, according to her own statement, had admitted the forlorn girl under her roof from the mere liking she had taken to her pretty face; but that this assertion was not more true than the generality of those uttered by the lauders of their own disinterestedness, became very evident when, according to Mrs. Bennett's calculation, her lodger had nearly received her money's worth for the few coins which yet remained to her.

"I cannot understand where it is all gone, Mrs. Bennett," said Annie, speaking in all innocence of offence, for in truth no shadow of suspicion had flitted across her mind. "I cannot understand it, indeed. I had ten pounds when I came, and——"

"Ten pounds!" shouted the pawnbroker's wife; "and I should like to know how far you think ten pounds is to go, in keeping a woman and a child, with house-rent and washing, and attendance and girl-hire, and a cup of tea at all times, indeed, like any lady. And now it's a mutton-chop a-day, if you please, because my lady's nursing; and to-morrow it will be a nice

cut of beef, I suppose—and all for ten pounds! Ugh! Dr. Black had better pay for the things himself, if he's going on in this way."

"I'm very sorry—I didn't mean——" began the trembling object of this burst of indignation. But before she could complete her humbly-commenced apology, Mrs. Bennett had flounced out of the room, banging the door after her with a sound which Dr. Black would strongly have deprecated, as highly detrimental to the weakened nerves of his young patient.

Perhaps, taking the comparison of minutes, there never had been one in the girl's short life more acutely painful than that which followed on the exit of her enraged landlady. Till then she had not been made to feel, by rudeness or neglect, that she had been placed by her lowliness and her shame outside the bounds of woman's kindness and charity; and very sad was this startling awaking to the stern reality of her position.

To add another, and no small item to Annie's distress, came also the remembrance that the doctor's visits had of late decreased, both in number and in length. Two days had now elapsed since she had seen him, and the unhappy girl, feeling utterly abandoned and deserted

in her gloomy chamber, wept over her sleeping child bitter tears of late and unavailing regret.

It was nearly seven o'clock, and she had been more than two hours totally alone before she began to notice, that in her close and stifling room the daylight, always faint and cheerless, was beginning to fade away, and that her slight evening meal, the "tea" mentioned by Mrs. Bennett as an extravagant indulgence, had not as usual been brought to her bedside.

"I hope I shall die!" she murmured, hopelessly; "I and poor baby too—and then father will forgive me. Poor father! I wonder what he is doing now—working in the great, beautiful Abbey gardens, and thinking of me, perhaps, among the flowers. Poor father!—I shall never, never see him again, or mother, or the children." And Annie wept softer tears as the memory of her childhood's home came back to her, and thoughts of the days when she was innocent and happy contrasted with the dark hours that were passing with such heavy lagging wings above her head.

But whilst the gardener's daughter lay forlorn and well-nigh broken-hearted on the hard bed which she feared would too soon be denied to

her and to her helpless infant, a young country-woman, well, but plainly dressed, as befitted her station, was making her way on foot to the narrow, crowded street, in one of the least promising-looking houses of which the desolate young creature was thus bemoaning herself, and repenting herself of the sin which she had committed.

Mary Hannum (for it was she) had been summoned by Dr. Black to London, on the first hint given by her sister that the sight of one of her family would be hailed by her with pleasure. But though the affectionate half-sister had at once and joyfully responded to the call, she had not neglected Annie's pecuniary interests in her haste to embrace once more the child over whom she yearned with almost a mother's love.

"It is very hard that father should have gone away, no one of us knows to where," she said, while consulting with her grandmother (who never found a fault with anything that Mary could say or do) concerning the arrangements for her journey—"very hard; because he could have gone to the Combe and spoken to Sir Matthew better than I can do. But we musn't let poor Annie want; though, mother, dear!" (she always called the old woman mother) it "isn't

much that we can do for her, compared to what Sir Matthew will : for he's a just man, and knows how the child's been wronged by him as is his own flesh and blood." And while she spoke Mary's fresh face flushed high with indignation ; for, as she truly said, Annie was but a child, and foolish—easily led astray by soft words and cunning promises.

When Mary Hannum returned from Hazel Combe, she brought with her a purse full of money for Annie's use, and the memory of many a kind and sympathising word, spoken in the fullness of his kindly nature by her generous landlord. He talked much, too, of the boy, promising that it should be adopted by him as his own grandchild, and treated ever and always as one of his own family. But he said no word of marriage as reparation for poor Annie's wrongs, nor indeed did his visitor notice the omission, for in her humility she had entertained no thought of so signal an elevation for her erring sister.

Deeply, earnestly, and feelingly did she express her gratitude for all that he had done and would still do for the helpless object of her solicitude ; but, as the door of the study closed upon honest Mary Hannum, a pang of self-

reproach sent the red blood to Sir Matthew's forehead, as he sank back disconsolately in his elbow-chair. For well, in the midst of her encomiums, did he know that his first thought, which had sprung from the dictates of his heart, had been neutralised by the reflections suggested by family pride and by the birth of that poor nameless infant. He consoled himself, however, with the memory of Santland's expressed conviction—and was not Santland always right?—namely, that the heir to Hazel Combe was little likely to consent to the alliance which his father had thought, on the first impulse of his impetuous pity, of proposing to him. And thus it was that the good sister went her way, rich in money, and in kind words and promises, but with no assurance that tardy justice, in the shape of a beautiful but plebeian wife, would be inflicted on the offender.

Mary had never been in London in her seven-and-twenty years of life. Locomotion was less easy in those days than it is in this latter half of our century, and Mary, who, in common with the country people round Hillingstone, had only heard speak of railroads as impossible facts, schemed by laughable madmen, had travelled to the metropolis outside the coach, which set her

down in Piccadilly, where for a minute or two she stood wondering, with the direction written by Dr. Black in her hand.

At last she bethought her to ask her way to Dudley Street, and her head having been turned eastward, with a recommendation to go straight on, she followed the direction fearlessly. But many, as may be supposed, were the wrong turnings which she took, as, with her little travelling-bag held firmly in her hand, she threaded her way amongst the crowded streets. She was a thrifty little body, and had been accustomed to use her legs; so—strange as it may seem—she never once thought of putting herself into one of the dirty, cumbrous hackney-coaches which from time to time she perceived, as she bustled onward to her destination.

She reached it at last, and turned sick at heart as she stood inside the door of the house which contained her sister. The air that filled the narrow passage seemed to her as though it were absolutely polluted; and so, indeed, it was—polluted by the breath of vice, generated by soul-defiling poverty, emanating from the poor, half-worn garments which, dangling from their strings and pegs, told their several tales of guilt and misery and privation. But it was a thriving

trade—that driven by the owner of those three golden balls, for it was based on a never-failing capital; and unredeemed pledges were as numerous in his dismal house, as are the promises of the spendthrift and the profligate.

It was nearly dark when Mary Hannum stood under the flaming jet of gas in Mr. Bennett's shop, and asked for her sister.

"Upstairs!" said the pawnbroker's wife; and then, without moving from her seat, she beckoned to a slipshod maid-of-all-work, and bade her show "the young woman" upstairs.

Very gently did the country-bred girl open the ill-fitting door of that comfortless attic, and then (for it was quite dark) made her presence known by a tender whisper and a kiss.

"Thank God! Oh, Mary—my own Mary!" cried Annie, as she threw her thin hot arms round her sister's neck, and sobbed hysterically, while she strove to pour forth words of joy and gratitude for the great boon which God had granted to her in her sore humiliation and distress.

CHAPTER XXII.

MYLES FALLS ON HIS LEGS.

GREATLY to the astonishment of the gossips who, in Hillingstone and its neighbourhood, prated of her whereabouts, Mary Hannum remained for nearly three months absent from the Upper Farm. It was altogether a very unsatisfactory time for the neighbours, who had gorged themselves with scandal at the exciting period of poor Annie's lapse from virtue, and who were now suffering from that vacuum which nature is said so greatly to abhor.

Excitement was at all times rare in that quiet country town, where the alarming sacrifice of female reputation was anything but a matter of every-day occurrence. There are seasons and places, as we all know, where the frail perishable things fall before a *note* of interrogation or admiration—are knocked down, in short, as the saying is, for a mere song; but this was not the case in the respectable Hillingstone neighbour-

hood, where young women, "thank God ! took pride in themselves, and were blessed with parents who looked after them."

To make matters worse, not a particle of information on which to work could be obtained from that "stiff old body," Mary's grandmother ; who, according to her own boast, "kept herself *to* herself, and said nothing to nobody."

"They were always a stuck-up lot, them Upper Farm people," remarked Mrs. Lee, of the post-office, as she sipped her tea one evening in the housekeeper's room at Westerham Abbey. "But, fine as they think themselves, they can't get over Miss Annie's doings ; and it 'll be some time, I 'm thinking, before *she* dare show herself and her finery in Hillingstone Church again."

And she was right there : but though the village beauty was seen no more within the sacred walls, a homelier figure, and one clad in deepest mourning, made her appearance on the following Sunday in the small Upper Farm pew ; and a bent-down head, to which a handkerchief was often raised to dry the falling tears, announced to the watchful congregation that the erring girl had passed from the merciless hands of her fellow-women to a tribunal where, by reason of her sore temptations, she might hope

for the mercy which was denied to her on earth.

There were no questions asked regarding Annie's death, strong as was the curiosity excited by the event; for Mary Hannum's grave face forbade inquiry on the subject, although she openly talked to several of the most respectable of her acquaintances concerning one of the consequences of the tragical occurrence.

For a time, doubts were entertained of the fact that little Myles—that small unfortunate, whose birth was a disgrace, and whose mother's name was a by-word—had been adopted into the family of Hazel Combe, and been allowed to bear the honoured name of Fendall. But when months and years went by, and letters came to "Dear Aunt Mary," from a little school-boy, whose pothooks-and-hangers grew by slow degrees to round-text and then to running-hand, no disbelief lingered in the sceptics' minds that the child, who signed himself "M. Fendall" in so bold a fashion, was Annie's son, and would one day come amongst them as a gentleman.

Meanwhile the child was never seen at the Combe, and the only aliment offered to curiosity concerning it lay in the fact of Sir Matthew's not unfrequent absences from his home for several

days together, and on the certainty that on his return Mary Hannum was always sent for to Hazel Combe, and was honoured by a private interview with its master.

This state of things had continued for about seven years, and the memory of the gardener's daughter had faded away from the minds both of her detractors and her admirers, when the lease of the Upper Farm fell in, and the old people by whom it had long been tenanted migrated—willingly, it was said—to another county, where a better and a larger farm was, through the interest and liberality of Sir Matthew Fendall, placed at their disposal.

Mary Hannum accompanied her relations in their exodus, and then, with the exception of an obscure sister of Joseph Hannum's (whom we have already seen in the cottage in the lane, where once the unhappy man had lived), the family of the Westerham gardener ceased to have any representative in the neighbourhood of Hazel Combe.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A COUNTRY "DINNER."

So many pages have been devoted to a recital of the wrongs and sorrows of the gardener's family, that I fear the reader may have forgotten the fact that ten years have elapsed since they occurred; and also that the little Myles, whom we left sleeping peacefully on his young mother's breast, is now a noisy school-boy, careering on his pony along the grass rides of the Combe, and, with the natural proneness of our kind to assume an importance if we have it not, evincing already a disposition to be treated as the heir to the rich possessions which he saw around him.

And yet Myles was as well aware as so young a child could be, of the disadvantages of birth under which he laboured. For Sir Matthew, careful—indeed over-careful, as he frequently was—of wounding the feelings of others, had been wise in this matter, and had so arranged that the sense of the lad's misfortune should not strike

upon him with the force of an unexpected blow. A timely revelation of the truth would, he hoped, be instrumental in preventing the birth of that sense of doubtful advantage, which men call pride of race; and thus, even as the unfortunates who are born blind, little Myles would not regret the privileges which he had never possessed the opportunity of appreciating.

But, whilst making these simple and rational calculations, Sir Matthew had not reckoned—as, indeed, how should he?—on the peculiar character of the boy, whose birth, as the old man thought, gave him so large a claim to sympathy and commiseration. He could not guess that Myles was as far both from demanding and expecting pity, as the acknowledged heir to the richest dukedom in the land; and he was also very far from conjecturing that the lad's innate self-conceit had already placed him far above any real successor, as yet unborn, to the greatly-coveted property of his grandfather; for be it known that Myles had the misfortune to be of an envious disposition—child though he was, and well as the craft of his nature had enabled him to conceal the existence of the vice.

“It was the kind of envy,” said Mr. Santland, when he had watched the boy's career for

years, "from which, when it is united to vanity such as his, ambition is born." And so in truth it was ; but what manner of ambition, the pages still to be written will disclose.

Meanwhile, Myles was, as I have said, a noisy schoolboy—noisy, at least, when amongst those who appreciated that boyish quality, but quiet enough with Sir Matthew—and very still indeed when admitted into the apartments of his great-grandmother, by whom he was generally mistaken for the son who had been a boy fifty years before, and whose hair was well nigh white as was her own.

He was a clever little fellow, ready with his tongue, quick at learning, and shrewd beyond the average in his perception of character. His companions at the private school where he was educated were well aware that he abused even a boy's privilege to lie: but then he was such a "deuced useful little fellow," and "so devilish sharp," that they could not afford (especially the elder ones—he was not particularly useful to those below him) to quarrel with Myles, though he was a "dirty little blackguard" sometimes, that they all agreed.

In person he was not nearly so good-looking as might have been expected, taking into con-

sideration his mother's fair, fresh beauty, and the regularity of feature supposed to be hereditary in the Fendall family. He was low in stature, too—what might, in short, be called a “stumpy boy,” with glittering blue eyes, fair, curling hair, and a freckled complexion. Such as he was, however, he was made much of at the Combe; the only exception to the rule being the lad's father, who would gladly have kept at a distance this living proof of his juvenile indiscretion; but for once Sir Matthew was peremptory, and the Colonel, very much *à contre-cœur*, was compelled to submit.

The dinner-party at Westerham Abbey, which was to precede, by four-and-twenty hours, the ball to which Bessie Forester had long looked forward with such extravagant delight, was to be a dignified, and, consequently—as Miss Janetta very naturally remarked—a terribly dull affair. There were no elements for flirtation, save and except that well-formed clay of human kind, the heir of Hazel Combe, and a very young Guardsman of the name of Mellish, who had been a school-fellow of Dick's, when the latter young gentleman wore a round jacket in a seminary near London. There had been other and better fellows in the establishment than Fred Mellish, who had been

known as rather a sneaking little dog, and who was now a white-haired young man, with reddish eyes, and, take him altogether—as a man—of a feeble aspect generally. The other "fellows"—I mean the better ones—had embraced, willingly or otherwise, more unassuming professions—such as the law and the line, the architectural and the medical; so "Dandy Dick" had naturally lost sight of those of his party associates, while he kept up friendly relations with the fragile Guardsman, and invited him to stay at the Abbey, in order to assist at the ball, which was to celebrate the coming of age of Dick Western of Westerham.

Mr. Santland, much to the Privy Councillor's satisfaction, had accepted the invitation to meet Lord Albert, and was now standing near his ward, and face to face with the Minister who had shown so flattering a desire to make his acquaintance.

"He looked well—dear Guardie did—even by the side of that distinguished-looking Lord Albert," said warm-hearted Bessie Forester to her lukewarm friend Janetta, when, after the ladies' return to the drawing-room, they talked over the guests, the dinner, and the conversation.

"It went off very well, take it altogether,"

said poor Mrs. Western, who looked dreadfully hot and excited, and whose fanning with her well-perfumed pocket-handkerchief had been continued throughout the whole of the lengthened meal, whenever she flattered herself she was unobserved. "Very well indeed, I think. It was only the patties that were very bad; I can't conceive what had been put into them! But Lord Albert did not eat one, I noticed that," added the worthy lady, triumphantly.

"No; but he tried the *lobster mayonnaise*, mamma," said the wantonly unkind Barbara, "and that was too horrid! Sarah must have put her *huile antique* from Hillingstone into it by mistake, or it never could have tasted so awfully!"

"How they have noticed everything Lord Albert devoured," thought the unsophisticated Bessie; "and as for Guardie or any one else, they might have poisoned themselves again and again, and no one would have cared."

"How did you like your neighbour, Miss Forester?" asked Mrs. Western, when she had in some degree recovered from the shock occasioned by her eldest daughter's unguarded communication. She always treated the Rector's ward unceremoniously, for that young lady, as she justly remarked, had no position whatever;

and, Whig and Liberal as she called herself, Mrs. Western was strongly against the confusing of classes, and the introduction into her set of any one whom no one knew anything about.

But Bessie Forester possessed too much independence of character, and was, withal, too little imbued with respect for the mere advantages of family and fortune to be easily subdued by the studied snubbings of a Mrs. Western of Westerham. She had grown up in the intimate companionship of a man whose conversation, by raising her mental standard, had fitted her for the enjoyment and appreciation of higher intellectual society than that which the usual routine of country life affords; and, till she should find those "naked facts," which Mrs. Western so unduly prized, adorned by the mental gifts she had learnt to value, the chances were greatly against Bessie Forester being taught by the great lady at the Abbey those lessons of humility which the latter was desirous to inculcate.

"I didn't like him at all," she said, in answer to Mrs. Western's query. "I tried him on one or two subjects, and as he did not seem to understand any of them, I gave it up."

"You tried him!" cried Barbara, sarcastically. "Oh, that's much too good! Mamma, did you

hear? Bessie Forester tried Mr. Lingard—Lord Albert's private secretary—the author of 'Told Out,' and all those wonderful pamphlets—only that—only one of the literary men that every one wants to know! And you found he did not understand you! Ha! ha! ha! I only hope the poor secretary will never know that Miss Bessie Forester found him a failure; he would be so dreadfully distressed!"

Bessie felt rather confused, and coloured considerably; but nothing would make her own that Mr. Lingard was agreeable in society.

"He is very clever, I daresay," she said, "but it is difficult to find that kind of thing out, unless a person speaks. I am sure, however," she added, good humouredly, "that it was because he liked his dinner better than he did me. Just as Guardie did. Did you notice him, Janetta? He was between Colonel Fendall—whom he seldom talks to if he can help it—and that odd-looking young man, who is like a great freckled girl dressed up in boy's clothes."

"That's Captain Mellish, of the Guards," said Barbara, imposingly.

"Is it? He doesn't look like a soldier; but, as Guardie said once of Mat Fendall, he'll do to stop a shot, and save a better man. But did

you see, Janetta, how dear Guardie seemed to enjoy his dinner? He says I give him such wretched things to eat, and always the same. But, what can I do? There is only beef and mutton, and chickens, and you must have small things for only two people. Oh, how I wish I knew how to order dinner better! Mrs. Western, do you think I might have a leg of mutton cut in two sometimes, when I have had a neck very often?"

It was a simple question—simply asked—although it is just possible that the crafty Bessie might have imagined she was paying a graceful compliment to the superior experience in domestic arrangements of the lady of the house, by thus meekly appealing for her assistance. But, if this were the case, the mistaken young woman became soon cognisant of her error; for to acknowledge an acquaintance with the mysteries of beef and mutton was entirely at variance with the exclusive principles of the Privy Councillor's wife.

A few cold words, keenly expressive of contempt for the topic of conversation selected by her young visitor, were causing poor Bessie (who for the second time felt herself convicted of a mistake) to wish herself safe once more in the

seclusion of her little Rectory chamber, when to her great relief the door opened, and the approach of her guardian, accompanied by Lord Albert, put an end to all feelings of fatigue or embarrassment.

He did not introduce her to his companion. He never either did or omitted anything after the fashion of other people, but merely said—

“Bessie, my child, Lord Albert and I are at fault about an argument used by Professor L—— in the lecture last week, and I have promised that your young memory will set us both to rights.”

A pretty flush spread over the girl's clear brown cheek as she asked herself whether or not her guardian had pledged himself to more than she was able to perform. For six days had elapsed since the lecture had been delivered in the town-hall of C——, by an eminent geological philosopher; and, deeply as it had interested her, Bessie felt very doubtful concerning the amount which had lingered within her memory.

“Did you like the lecture?” said Lord Albert, kindly, for he saw her embarrassment, and was good-naturedly desirous to allay it.

“I did, and I did not,” she said, hesitatingly, “I could not like what he said about our having

been all originally monkeys ; and, besides, I am sure I have no taste for being puzzled."

"If he puzzled you," said Lord Albert, with a smile, "he is deficient in the first and most important quality of a lecturer, whose explanations and whose meaning should be caught at once by every individual amongst his hearers ; for the obscurity of a single sentence is certainly calculated (by unduly taxing the reasoning powers of the listener) to throw the succeeding arguments into apparent confusion."

"And a country audience is made up of Bessies," responded Santland, with a grave and half-satirical glance of amusement at his ward ; "but, never mind, my dear, you have your right to an opinion, although, being but a feather-weight, it may not come down upon the poor professor with the leaden force of Hillingstone arguments. My lord," he continued, turning to Lord Albert, "you most probably remember Horne Tooke's answer to his opponent in argument, who seriously proposed to him to take the sense of the company as regarded the question at issue?"

Lord Albert shook his head.

"'Do so,' he said, 'by all means ; but I'll take the nonsense, and I'll beat you.' But talking of

nonsense reminds me of the county paper. I know Mr. Western takes it in, and we shall there have the lecture in full. Bessie, bestir yourself; and when you have found that humble specimen of a necessary evil, bring it here."

There was considerable excitement manifested in the drawing-room at Westerham Abbey, directly it became known that the great man had expressed a desire to make himself acquainted with the last number of the "South Down Patriot."

"What could it mean? Was his lordship about to ——?" "Hush! there's that article in it—I know whose it is—which alludes to perquisites: 'Keep your hands from picking and stealing;'—you remember the heading, so like one of Isaac Spyall's?" "Yes, I confess I thought it strong—very strong; and I wouldn't be Western, to have such a paper found in the house. His son's chances are over, I suspect, for there's no one so illiberal as your Whig in power." "Hush! the secretary will hear you." "Never mind if he does; I daresay he knows the article by heart—those London fellows have all their wits about them."

The last speaker was an independent country squire, red-faced and rich, and tolerably indifferent

as to the chances of place or patronage. Nevertheless, he moved away from the neighbourhood of the private secretary, and took refuge near the ample skirts of the Privy Councillor's lady.

"My dear lord," the latter was saying, "I really am quite distressed—those servants" (I really believe she muttered something about the Groom of the Chambers) "always will read the newspapers; it's the march of intellect, I suppose, and the schoolmaster being all abroad. Janetta, do ring the bell again. Surely by this time they must have found the 'Patriot,' it was only yesterday morning that I was reading it myself."

The bell was rung, and duly answered by the unsophisticated domestic whose duty it was, for the sum of twenty pounds per annum, paid quarterly, to attend to similar calls upon his time and attention."

"Where is the 'Patriot'?" asked the lady, viciously; "I have desired frequently that no newspapers should be removed till orders were received from me, and——"

But even as she spoke, John approached respectfully, with a silver salver in his hand.

"It's all the pieces of the 'Patriot' as was left, ma'am," he said, exhibiting some greased and blackened remains of paper which he held before

his fastidious mistress ; “ and it ’ s the very one as you gave orders, ’ m, was to be put round the haunch of mutton.”

“ A basted ‘ Patriot ’ ! ” said Santland, with another of his grave smiles, which increased into something very like a laugh when, during their walk home, Bessie told the tale of her simple domestic questionings, and of the magnificent contempt for household economy evinced by the Privy Councillor’s wife.

“ She wouldn’t hear of such vulgar things as roasted joints, Guardie,” said Bessie, whose amusement at the occurrence was intense.

“ Truly, my child,” said Santland, “ it was well remarked that ‘ conscience doth make cowards of us all ; ’ and if the worthy woman’s sleep to-night be not murdered by the memory of that closing scene, she is indeed a hardened and a hopeless specimen of her sex.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIRST STEP.

THE next morning, Lord Albert paid an early visit to the Rector, whom he found in his garden, superintending the bedding out of some choice plants, and arranging their various colours with an artist's eye.

He took off his hat (with the old-fashioned courtesy which was habitual to him) when he saw the minister approaching along the gravel walk ; but the latter held out his hand with the familiarity of an old acquaintance.

" You have a pretty place here," he said, after civilities had been exchanged ; " all the *agréments* of the Park, with its verdure and its spreading trees, and——"

" None of the expense and responsibility entailed by their possession," said Santland, seeing that Lord Albert delayed the very natural termination to his remark. " You are quite right, my Lord ; for this is, as I daresay you are

aware, one of those family livings entailed by custom immemorial on the second son. There is very little to do—the stipend is large—the cottages are model ones, and the rich take all extra trouble off your hands, and give tithes of all that they possess.”

It required an intimate acquaintance with the Rector’s “ways,” as Jane the footwoman called them, to understand the amount of irony usually contained in his conversation ; and as his present auditor was as yet without a key to the peculiarities of his host’s character, he replied more to the expression, which he fancied he could translate, in Mr. Santland’s countenance, than to the words which he had used.

“Young Fendall gave up the advantages you speak of, did he not ?” he asked ; “a living of eight hundred a-year, and a charming place like this, because he felt that, by accepting it, he would be a party to an abuse ? I beg your pardon, Mr. Santland ; I acknowledge that it was Quixotic ; but one must respect a man who illustrates his principles by his actions. So few of us are capable of such a sacrifice, that from its very rarity it is a description of heroism which arrests one’s attention.”

“So few of us, comparatively speaking, have

an opportunity of distinguishing ourselves by the virtue of self-immolation," remarked Mr. Santland, "that it would be difficult to reduce to numbers those who may claim to be regarded as martyrs to their theories, or their principles,—call them what you will," he added ironically.

"True," said the minister, with a smile. "But about young Fendall I am anxious to know your opinion, for, to my thinking, and from all I have heard, he has in him the makings of a useful if not a remarkable man. He was my son's favourite chum at Oxford, and their friendship has continued since—so warmly, indeed, that it has stood the test of absence and even letter-writing. I have seen some of John Fendall's letters since he has been in the United States, and in my opinion they bear evidence of a mind singularly enlarged, and of a disposition marked by that rare quality—a genuine and unselfish philanthropy."

During this short colloquy, the two men had been standing within earshot of one who sat, needle in hand, but hidden by the muslin curtains, in the bay-window of the drawing-room. She had not meant to listen as she pursued her self-imposed task of hemming one of her guar-

dian's delicate cambric cravats, but it was not in Bessie's nature to hear unmoved the name of Johnnie Fendall; and when, too, the mention was coupled with such praise from one accustomed to judge of men and motives, what wonder that her heart beat high with pleasure, and that she held her breath, for fear one word of what might follow should escape her hearing!

But, listen and wait as she would, poor Bessie was fated to remain contented with only the small quota of eulogium by which she had been so much delighted; for her guardian and his companion soon betook themselves to a shady walk at the far end of the shrubbery, where she could only catch occasional glimpses of them, as for an hour or more they paced beneath the spreading elms which bordered that portion of the grounds.

According to Bessie's belief—indeed, it would have been hard to persuade her that the pedestrians could have found a more interesting topic of conversation—they were still talking of Johnnie Fendall when they passed again near her post of observation: for what other subject of discussion, what other theme on which they might be descanting, could, in her opinion, cause the appearance of absorbed interest in their conver-

sation which was so apparent in the manner and countenance of both?

Nor was Bessie entirely wrong in her conjecture, improbable as it would at first sight appear, that Sir Matthew's younger son should have been deemed by those two earnest, thinking men of sufficient importance to engross so long their undivided attention.

"Guardie, dear," said Bessie, coaxingly, the first moment she could obtain private speech of the Rector, "what have you and Lord Albert been talking about so long under the elm-trees?"

"Talking about, child? Why, we were talking of things and people beyond the limits of your finite comprehension. We were dilating on the talents and merits of your friend Mrs. Western, and regretting the blind injustice of the world. Lord Albert has a true and just appreciation of character, and he considers her in the light of a Madame Récamier *incomprise*."

"Now, Guardie, you are laughing at me! I am sure that is not true."

"Well, child, if you must know—but it is a very serious secret, and you must promise not to chatter about it, and let all the world know that you are intrusted with the secrets of the State——"

"Oh, Guardie! I promise I won't repeat a single word!" cried the girl, flushing all over with eagerness.

"Come nearer, then, for I must whisper it into your pretty little ear. Don't start! Well, then, Lord Albert came to consult me——"

"I was sure of it," cried Bessie, clapping her hands triumphantly.

"Exactly; of course you guessed it. What are little girls for if they can't pounce in a moment on the meaning of a parable, and read a riddle before it is out of the propounder's mouth?"

"Oh! but I am listening, really, dear Guardie," said poor Bessie, humbly; for she was beginning to be terribly afraid that the much-coveted confidence would be withheld from her, after all.

"And you won't tell?"

"No, indeed—I promise, again and again, that I won't."

The Rector looked into her dark flashing eyes, to which the unwonted colour in her cheeks lent more than usual brightness.

"Bessie," he said, solemnly, "I feel that I can trust you; and in the autumn of my life there is pleasure in the thought that one woman at least is to be relied on."

She bent her face towards him eagerly.

“Know, then,” he said, “that his Lordship arrived thus early at the Rectory, and demanded of me a private conference, in order to ascertain, from the most reliable source, whether it was expected that he should compliment the county by wearing pumps at the ball; and if—but, Bessie, of course I found it difficult to satisfy his curiosity on that head—if I thought it probable that you would wear the dress of a Watteau shepherdess, and dance Sir Roger de Coverley with him after supper.”

And having so said, Mr. Santland put his straw hat on his head, and, having armed himself with his favourite copy of Horace, sauntered out again beneath the friendly shadows of the branching elms.

The usual dinner-hour at the Rectory was six o'clock, and the moment the short repast was over, Bessie announced to her astonished guardian that she was about to commence the adornment of her person for the ball.

“Already, child!” he exclaimed—“already going to be a thing of shreds and patches. I like you better in that petticoat you have about you than I shall when you have amused yourself for two hours or more with the ‘adulteries of art.’”

The Rector was rather discomposed at the prospect of his early solitude, which Bessie seeing, she resumed her seat, and with a pleasant little laugh reminded her guardian that he had never yet seen her dressed like a lady.

“And Guardie, dear,” she said, pleadingly, “you must remember it is my first ball, and I do so long to begin!”

Mr. Santland looked at her bright truthful face with marked approbation.

“Honest girl!” he said, “many a young woman in your situation could have laid the blame on buttons to sew on, or pins to put into their proper places. Ah well, child! I must make the most of the days of guilelessness that remain to you; for the time is coming when you will learn the terrible lesson, that deceit is as necessary to women as—what shall I say?—the mirror on their toilet-table, or the whalebones in their stays, and——”

“Oh, Guardie! how very horrid!”

“Horrid! No! You will learn it all by degrees: and your A, B, C will be to appreciate the wisdom of silence; after the mastering of which grand rudimental difficulty, the remaining lessons will be learned easily enough.”

The old clock was striking nine when Bessie,

adorned in what the Rector called her "braverie," entered the quiet library, and stood, candle in hand, before the student, who seemed, by a more than usual amount of absorption in his favourite authors, to be making amends for the lost time which on the previous evening he had spent so unprofitably.

As the girl had truly said, although in her inaccurate phraseology, the Rector had never seen her "dressed" before; and he looked at her now with dazzled eyes, in which surprise was as strongly marked as admiration.

And yet she was very simply attired—her dress being of a thin white floating fabric, and her dark hair ornamented with one single snow-white lily, matched by the flower that looped up her graceful robe. She was almost too young as yet for woman's charms to have developed themselves quite fully; and Santland's critical eye, as he took in a rapid glance of her *tout ensemble*, noticed that the arms were not yet rounded as the rules of art required, and that the waist was deficient in that perfect contour, which in early girlhood is so often wanting.

"How I wish you were coming with me, Guardie!" she said, with a pretty blush, and a

still prettier smile. "I shall make so many mistakes——"

"What, in your steps, child?" he said, half sadly, as he led her to the hired carriage that awaited her. "Mind the *first* one, dear, and the rest will take care of themselves."

She did not understand him, as, with a heart light and pure as the lily on her bosom, she left the lonely man to wear away the night among his dusty books, and his still more sombre recollections.

CHAPTER XXV.

BESSIE'S FIRST BALL.

CERTAINLY, an inconvenient amount of bashfulness was not to be complained of as a possession by Mr. Santland's ward, and yet her courage almost failed her as she contemplated making her *entrée* alone amongst the many strangers whom she would find assembled in the ball-room of Westerham Abbey.

She had ample time to dwell upon the peculiarities and awkwardness of her position, for she had a drive of two miles before her; and, although the old Hillingstone fly had many "jobs" in hand that night, a great amount of speed could scarcely be expected from an animal whose days of work were nearly over before the Westerham ball imposed so unexpected a tax on his declining powers.

Of a ball, as an amusement, Bessie Forester had only an abstract idea. To her, the very name spoke volumes of incomprehensible and

unfathomable enchantment ; for she had still to learn (nor is her ignorance surprising), that to enjoy such an evening of unmitigated delight as she had promised herself, some other ingredients are necessary besides a large room, a chalked floor, a band of music, and partners in discretion.

“ I wonder whom I shall dance with ? ” murmured the country-girl to herself, as a white signpost, gleaming through the darkness, betrayed to her the fact that she was at the Cross Lanes, and within half a mile of the Abbey Lodge. “ I do wonder very much whom I shall dance with ? Colonel Fendall may ask me, but I don’t think he will ; and besides, it would seem so odd to dance with a man who has a great son like that. As to Dandy Dick, as Mr. Western calls him, he never condescends to notice me ; and I wouldn’t say ‘ Yes ’ to the freckled Guardsman, if he were to ask me on his knees.”

By the time that Miss Bessie Forester (the not-too-well-accounted-for ward of the mysterious Rector of Combe Hatton) had arrived at this climax in her cogitations, the lodge-gates had long been passed, and a sudden light shining in upon the window of her vehicle, showed that the Abbey was reached at last.

Bessie's heart beat very quick as, aided by no servant of her own, she descended from her lowly equipage, and made her way up the broad stone steps, and into the well-lighted hall, through which ladies, in toilettes far richer though scarcely more tasteful than her own, were proceeding slowly towards the reception-room.

At that moment the girl—you must remember, lenient reader, that she was but country-bred—would have given much for any companion, however humble (nay, I rather incline to think that humility just then would have been at a premium with poor Bessie), who would have supported her through the ordeal of that trying moment. She had no confidence whatever in the sympathy or friendly offices of the young ladies of the house; for even Janetta, who was usually so “talking” and good-natured, had shown her the cold shoulder on the previous evening, when either her own grander dress, or the presence of more imposing company, had—but it is to be hoped unknown to herself—changed her usually cordial manner into one of stiffness and ceremony.

Mrs. Western's greeting to her young guest was not encouraging to a nervous *débutante*—it being a studied and successful mixture of dignity.

and condescension; and as to Barbara and Janetta, albeit that throughout the preceding week they had gladly accepted Bessie's willing aid in the arrangement of the ball-room ornaments, they were far too much engrossed by themselves, and by the reception of such among their guests as they delighted to honour, to have any time to bestow upon their obscure and humble friend.

So, although the grand old rooms were filled with company, and with the inspiring sounds of the well-played dance-music—though Bessie was young, and handsome to look upon, and could even boast of the *air distingué* which, in the language of that modern Bœotia, *id est*, the fashionable world, is the *ne plus ultra* of commendation;—for all this, I say, Bessie sat unnoticed, partnerless, and silent.


Let not those despise her who have outlived, or who have never endured, the severe though (happily) fleeting pangs of disappointments such as hers. She was very foolish certainly, and over and over again she represented to herself that uncheering though edifying truth. But the medicine, though severe, proved utterly inefficacious, for philosophy at seventeen is too anomalous to be possible; and the tears *would*

rise to poor Bessie's eyes, and moisten her long upturned lashes, in spite of all the harsh names which, in her indignation at her folly, she called herself.

How she *had* looked forward to that evening ! For how many nights had she lain awake sleepless (the happy sleeplessness of early life, before a cold reality has usurped the place of glowing visions), and thought no hours were too many, or too long, which she might devote to dwelling on an event so brilliant and so longed for !

And yet—for a keen sense of the ludicrous was amongst the dangerous, but pleasant, gifts with which Fortune had endowed her—the Rector's ward found herself at one moment almost smiling, amidst her girlish sorrows, at the recollection of her uncalled-for fastidiousness.

“ I need not have so sternly decided upon refusing Captain Mellish as a partner,” was her inward remark ; “ for he is much too devoted to the General's daughters, and to those frightful Ladies Pencliffe.” I am afraid that Bessie was woman enough to be glad that they *were* frightful, although she did not care a rush for the Guardsman, and felt no envy of the objects of his attention ; but she was in a misanthropical



mood—one of those moods which are engendered by neglect and injustice, and in what, in Bessie's case, may truly be called a first disappointment.

“How he does hop about and chatter!” she thought—“exactly like some half-fledged bird. And how stout and heavy Colonel Fendall looks! As for Dandified Dick, with his lisp and his silly little laugh, his sprig of myrtle in his buttonhole, and his death's-head cravat-pin, he is too unmanly to be called a partner; and I declare I would as soon *stand up*”—(Bessie's phraseology was not always elegant)—“with Janetta or Barbara.”

Clearly the girl was growing angry with the world, which, according to its fashion, was in her case testing merit by success; and, in her anger, she immolated at the altar of her mortified vanity the acquaintances by whom she was so cruelly neglected and overlooked. But even whilst permitting herself this doubtful consolation, she could scarcely conceal from her own heart the mortifying fact, that she would have given much—ay, possibly, the pretty turquoise-ring upon her finger, her guardian's latest gift—for only one quadrille, even though her partner were no other than the much-despised Guards-

man, with his fair freckled face and bird-like hop-o'-my-thumbness of demeanor. For Bessie's foot, in its white satin slipper, was beating time to the music beneath her flowing dress of gauze; and, besides, she had practised all her steps so hard and so often, greatly to the amusement of the Rector, when he had chanced to come upon her unawares, and had found her flitting along the floor, to the accompaniment only of her wringing, clear young voice.

It would be so hard, she thought, to confess next morning to her guardian that she had not danced at all; and he would laugh at her perhaps—(she wronged him, however, there)—and would call her "Silly child," and bid her give her pretty dress to the next May-day Queen who danced in glittering spangles before the Rectory porch.

An hour—it was one of the longest she had ever spent—had passed away; and Bessie's thoughts, in the depths of her mortification, had strayed away to a very humble friend—even to Jane the footwoman, whose anticipations of enjoyment and triumph for her young lady had been almost greater than her own. With exceeding care had the faithful woman (she had lived many years in the Rector's service) decked

her young mistress for that brilliant entertainment; and when she smoothed for the last time a truant fold in the snow-white gossamer dress, she had affirmed, with with an honest confidence in her own prophetic powers, that among all the grand carriage-company no one would be looked at by the side of pretty Miss Bessie, with her shining hair and bright black eyes—God bless her!

The girl was thinking how very sorry she would be to disappoint the expectations of the sanguine woman, and had even gone so far as to consider how best to break to her the truth, when, chancing to look up, she perceived standing near her no less a personage than Lord Albert Ramsey.

He was talking to a man considerably younger than himself, and whose profile was so turned that Bessie could at first distinguish but a small portion of a face, which, however, she could not help fancying she had seen before. It belonged to one whose age might be a little under thirty years, and who, besides that he was slight in frame, was somewhat beneath the middle height. A beardless face, too, it was—cold, thoughtful, and unimpulsive—with a broad forehead, bronzed, as was every feature, by exposure to the weather

in the distant climes in which he had apparently been sojourning.

Bessie had not looked for more than half a minute at that slight insignificant figure, when her pale-brown cheek flushed to a crimson hue, as a flood of memory, turbid, wild, and sudden, rushed to her young heart, and told her who that weather-beaten stranger was.

Half a moment only had she given to doubt, and then all thoughts of self—of her isolation, her disappointment, and her mortification—were at an end ; for Johnnie Fendall had returned amongst them from his wanderings—Johnnie Fendall was within hearing of her voice : and the ball-room, which had a moment before seemed peopled with her enemies, was now as a temple of delight, in which joy and happiness could alone find place !

CHAPTER XXVI.

BESSIE IS TAUGHT A LESSON.

“WELL, Bessie, my butterfly, my brown beauty of the beech-woods, let me hear all about the ball. Was the first step successful, or had the child, as usual, been imposing on the woman? Did you listen to much pretty nonsense, and were there sighs enough around you to satisfy even a sentimental damsel of sweet seventeen?”

“There were no sighs at all, Guardie,” said Bessie, laughing; “and I beg leave to decline being called sentimental. But, before I answer a single question, I insist on your hearing the great event of the day, the wonderful news of the night, the ——”

“Videlicet,” said her guardian, seeing that she blushed and hesitated.

“Videlicet,” repeated Bessie, recovering herself, “that Johnnie—Mr. Fendall, I mean—was at the ball, and not the least changed, except

that he looks very much older, and has grey hairs at his temples. But he is just as pleasant, and not grand the least, and he ——”

“Danced with Bessie Forester, I suppose, and turned her foolish head with his foreign notions! Pshaw, child! Give me my tea, and talk of something else,” said Mr. Santland, who, for some reason known only to himself, seemed desirous of checking this rapid flow of panegyric.

Poor Bessie felt chilled and disappointed. She had made quite a fête to herself of her guardian’s surprise, of the questions which he would ask her concerning the traveller, and of all the many things she would have to tell him about Johnnie Fendall’s looks and words and actions. But, although she was certainly very sorry, her restoration to good temper and good spirits was not more than the affair of a moment, and she was soon ready to entertain her guardian with her lively account of the evening’s amusement.

He smiled rather sadly when she told him how she had at first been shunned, and how weary an hour she had passed.

“It is but the beginning of sorrows, Bessie child,” he said; “and if you were a wise virgin

(which you are not), you would hide your little lamp under a bushel of some sober parson's unsown wild oats, and never think again of what that sensible woman, Jane, calls high-up gentlemen and carriage-people."

"But, Guardie, I never do think of them," pleaded Bessie; "and, besides, I was quite happy at the ball, after the first; and I believe that, on the whole, I danced very nearly as much as other people."

"I'll be bound you did, and 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' with Lord Albert, besides. Was he very agreeable?"

"Oh, very! So quaint and odd, and in such spirits! I never should have taken him for a great man."

"Had you a previous idea, then, you silly Bessie, that 'great men' never smile, but have always hanging about them a cloud of blue-devils, in addition to all the other noxious imps which harass them, even as the flight of sparrows swarming around the eagle in the air? Truly, for a young lady who knows but little of the world, you have formed to yourself rather an exaggerated idea of the annoyances attendant upon wealth and greatness."

"Talking about sparrows," Bessie said, "re-

minds me that we had such fun about little Captain Mellish. His mother was a daughter of the Sir Augustus Sparrow, whom the Westerns talk so much about, and he is in the Guards, you know."

"Is he, dear? I did not know it, but it's very probable," said Mr. Santland, who was gently tapping the "big end" of the bantam's egg which, as usual, formed the staple of his breakfast.

"Yes; and I never guessed before how highly one is expected to consider those kind of officers. Captain Mellish had not seemed to know that I was in the room, till he saw Lord Albert talking to me; but then he came up, and evidently concluded that I should be delighted with three fingers of his left hand, which he held languidly towards me."

"Bessie, I grieve to see the germs of ingratitude spreading thus early in your young heart."

"I was too enchanted to dance at all," said Bessie, not heeding the interruption—"to care the least which hand he gave me; but dancing was not nearly so pleasant as I had thought it would be, for Captain Mellish decidedly thought more of himself than of me. And then he was

so stupid, telling me it was hot when he might have seen that I was fanning myself till my arm ached, and informing me that the room was crowded, when I was still suffering from Lady Pencliffé's sharp elbows, as she squeezed past me into the supper-room."

"Bessie! Bessie!" remonstrated the Rector, "how often must I tell you that the agreeable vice of detraction is one of the most hateful and dangerous that it is given to us to commit?"

"But, Guardie, listen," said Bessie, who had clearly taken the bridle from her tongue, and thus rendered the arrest of that unruly member a matter of difficulty. "Listen, please, and hear about Dick Western. He was more ridiculous than ever with his lisp, and his importance; and Johnnie—Mr. Fendall, I mean—and I were so amused——"

"Miss Forester," said Mr. Santland, interrupting her, and speaking with great gravity, "you are now what is called a grown-up young lady launched upon the sea of life, to sail along steadily or otherwise, according as you place discretion or passion at the helm—youth and pleasure being of course (as the sailors say) 'forrard.' But, although I may have virtually no longer any right to offer my advice, yet I may

perhaps be allowed to suggest that it would save some trouble if you could make up your mind at once as to the manner in which you intend to designate Mr. John Fendall, of Hazel Combe—whether as ‘Johnnie’ (which I confess sounds to my ears rather questionably familiar), or as ‘Mr. Fendall,’ as becomes a young woman whose manners and modes of speech have not been entirely neglected.”

Bessie blushed: it was easy enough to call the colour to her cheek, and Johnnie’s name was always a mighty beautifier.

“I am so sorry, Guardie dear,” she faltered; “I did not mean——”

“I never thought you did, my dear—your sex is your safeguard against any such accusation; and now for Dandy Dick, since it is not every day one has so interesting a topic of conversation.”

“It was only about his pride in his friend, Captain Mellish that we were so amused,” said the rather abashed Bessie. “He would not hear a word in his dispraise. He was so sought after—went to all the best people’s balls; and to crown all—‘You know, Miss Forester,’ he said, ‘his uncle may be a duke some day, and his mother was a Spavvow.’”

"A what?" asked Mr. Santland.

"A *Spavvow*, Guardie. Lord Albert knew what he meant, for he said directly that he was sure she was, and of the Bow Bells family too. I had not an idea what that was, but I laughed with the rest."

"You little goose!" said the Rector, with a grim smile. "Have you never heard of the ancient English family of which all the sons were beaux, and all the daughters belles, as every noodle knows? But," he added, more seriously, "did you notice whether this wonderful Lord Albert seemed to appreciate our friend Johnnie? Were they often engaged in conversation, and did their conversation appear to you to be of a serious character?"

"Very!—and they were closeted together late in the evening for a length of time. Guardie, I am quite certain there is something going on, and I do so want to know what it is."

"I have no doubt you do. Bessie, it is my fixed opinion, that had you been our common mother, you would have been anything but an uncommon woman; for, instead of waiting for the Tempter, you would have cut the apple open at once, and satisfied your female curiosity as to the taste thereof."

If the paradoxical speaker imagined that his ward would attempt a justification either of herself or her sex, he was deceived, for Bessie pursued her own train of thought without noticing his disparaging remarks.

"There is one thing of which I am perfectly certain," she said, "and that is, that Janetta Western intends to marry Colonel Fendall."

"But there will be two words to that bargain, I suppose," suggested the Rector.

"Yes, but Janetta has such thousands more at her disposal than Colonel Mat; and she smiles so sweetly in his face, and informs every one who will listen to her, that Colonel Fendall delivered her from the clutches of a madman. And that reminds me, Guardie, that you have never told me who that dreadful creature was. I heard from Jane that you went to the Workhouse to see him, and that he was taken afterwards to the County Lunatic Asylum; but more than that I could not make her tell me. Perhaps, however, she knew nothing, any more than Colonel Fendall did; for when I asked him if he had ever seen the man before, he said something that sounded like 'No,' and turned the conversation. Johnnie—Oh, I'm so sorry! I mean Mr. Fendall

—was just the same, and from neither of them could I learn anything.”

She looked up at her guardian as she spoke, and was surprised to see how sad and serious was the expression which had stolen over his face. He did not answer her, for he was thinking of a miserable man, a human wreck—mindless, and voiceless, and forlorn—made into a dreadful thing (a thing from which men turned in fear and loathing) through the ill-deeds of him who, rich in the world’s good things, went on his way rejoicing. Long years before, that poor and blighted madman had abandoned hope—then bade farewell to fear, and last of all—it was his comfort—to remorse. But still amidst the darkness of his mind there was a faint and wavering glimmer—a wild and dancing death-fire, shimmering through his spirit, like light from graves on the foul marshes where the murdering vapours rise. Fitful and wandering was it, that strange light which lured him on to murderous deeds, and spelt in characters of flame the direful word—Revenge.

“Sit near me, Bessie, and I will tell you a story—a sad one, child, but of such this dreary world is full;” and the Rector, as he spoke,

pushed his cup and plate from before him, and rested his arms upon the table.

It was soon told—that melancholy tale of little Annie's fate, and of the poor gardener's ruined family and blasted hopes.

"You must not speak of all these bygone things to any one, my child," said Santland, when, his short story being ended, he bid the tender-hearted Bessie dry her eyes, and come into the garden. "And above all—but that I need not tell you—never seem to know, when you are with the Fendalls, that little Paul is grandson to a lunatic, and heir to no heritage but that of shame and sorrow.

They rose from the breakfast-table, and as they did so, one of the glass doors which opened on the lawn turned on its hinges, and Bessie's eyes encountered those of Johnnie Fendall.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE COMING ELECTION.

SUBSEQUENT events fully proved that Bessie was justified in her suspicion that something was going on in which Johnnie Fendall was especially interested; for four-and-twenty hours had not elapsed after Lord Albert's departure, which took place the morning after the Westerham Abbey ball, when it was more than whispered that Sir Matthew's younger son was about to stand for the county.

The Privy Councillor's wife was greatly exasperated when the news (after careful preparation) was imparted to her by her somewhat unsympathising husband.

"Gracious Heavens! Mr. Western," she exclaimed, "I never will believe it! To give up your own son's rights in this way! To make us all a laughing-stock to everybody!"

"Query, now," said Mr. Western, drily; "if everybody is to laugh, who is left to excite their

ridicule? Take a thousand from a thousand, and nothing remains."

"Oh, nonsense, Mr. Western—I'm really sick of your absurdities!" said the poor lady, who was now thoroughly exasperated. "It is really quite dreadful to hear a person at your time of life talking with so little sense!"

"I beg to say, my dear," rejoined the Privy Councillor, "that I am not in the habit of talking with that portion of my individuality; I leave that exercise of ingenuity to such of my friends as are not gifted with the free use of their tongues."

"How tiresome! If you would only be serious for a moment, how thankful I should be! But only to think of Johnnie Fendall, whose father never was in Parliament, standing for the county!"

"Parliament! Standing for the county! My dear Maria, for a woman whose husband has sat on the Treasury benches, your language is decidedly unparliamentary. Surely you must know by this time that the House of Commons *sits*, and that——"

"Pshaw! I wont say another word, except to ask you whether it was not always a generally understood thing that——?"

"Mrs. Western," rejoined her husband, gravely, "my experience of life tells me, and yours might have afforded you a similar lesson, that of all the obscure things in existence, the most thoroughly incomprehensible are those which are supposed to be generally understood."

"If you would but let me speak! Did not General Tuckfield say that he would only keep the seat till Dick was ready for it, and then that he was to accept some Government place instead?"

"And Dick was to come in with flying colours, and be a prime minister at the age of William Pitt, Mrs. Western! It is clear to me that you ought to have been the mother of the Gracchi, or of Coriolanus at the very least, instead of the aspiring parent of Dick Western the Witless, who will never rise to anything higher in his profession than to be a dancing-man about town, with a rose in his buttonhole, and an adoration for fine ladies burning in his breast."

"It was such fun to hear Papa and Mama about the election!" said Janetta to Colonel Matthew. (That young lady's organ of veneration was not so fully developed as were sundry

others, which led her to the pursuit of the said Colonel, as well as to other active measures for the attainment of her end). "You never heard such fun! And then came Dick, looking just as pleased with himself as if he were already member for the county. By his account, it was a case of what he called *Lom bow-wow du choix*; for his friend Mellish had told him that the Duke would bring him in for Stampford any day; and he hinted something about the North Riding of Yorkshire going to send him a deputation because of Uncle Westerham's property and influence."

"And his sister Janetta's," responded the gallant Colonel. "He must not reckon *that* for nothing. If I were a voter, I'd sell my conscience any day for a—ahem!—a smile from you, and very pretty bribery it would be!"

"Papa said," responded Miss Janetta, who made a laudable effort not to appear unduly elated by this specimen of Mat's style of love-making—"Papa said that Mama had talked bribery and corruption enough to entail a contested election on the most respectable country gentleman that was ever returned for Parliament."

Colonel Matthew thought so too: for since the world began, had not women's hearts told them

what to say and do—how to reason, and how, thank God, to love?

It was not for the young lady to enter into the question of how much either love or reason had to do with a county election, for the signal for a flirtation had been given; and as, after being duly accepted, it was conducted by both parties in one of the usual stereotyped forms, I shall abstain from recording the particulars of the dialogue which ensued.

The quiet county and neighbourhood of which I write was aroused from its state of chronic dulness by the approaching general election, which was appointed to take place on an early day in the ensuing month. It wanted but a fortnight to the important time; and it had already been announced that Mr. Fendall, notwithstanding the passive submission of Mrs. Western's son and the known protection of the Government, would not be allowed to walk quietly over the course. For General Tuckfield, who had now for several years been accustomed to write M.P. after his name, showed himself extremely unwilling to relinquish the magic letters on which alone his importance in the eyes of the county depended; perhaps, too, he found his

seat in other ways a comfortable one, and on that account refused to respond to the popular cry (as represented in the person of Johnnie Fendall) of *ôte toi de là que je m'y mette*.

The Liberal party—General Tuckfield called himself a Whig—treated the idea of any difficulty in that quarter with contempt; nor did even the glowing public pledges contained in the General's public address, nor the still more numerous promises which he was more than suspected of insinuating in private, succeed in arousing any alarm in the breasts of Johnnie's supporters, as regarded the safe and sure return of their candidate.

But notwithstanding this openly-expressed security, there were those among the "old stagers"—the "steady-goers" of that unchange-loving county—who were inclined not only to think, but to hope, that the General's chance was not wholly at a discount. He was oldish, certainly, and slow—that could not be denied: but then, if he did no good, he did little harm. Besides, they knew the worst of him, which was an argument clearly impossible to be advanced in favour of that flighty young man from America, who had probably come home primed with notions perilous to the

safety of the community, and subversive of all old-established rules of order and safe government.

In addition to these indistinct apprehensions of Mr. Fendall's unfitness for the high honour that was intended him, there existed the plain and simple fact of the young candidate's printed and published address to the free and independent electors on whose approbation he must rely for success. It was an address which, in the opinion of many (and those not amongst the least influential) was both disrespectful and undignified. Not a pledge in it from beginning to end, nor even the mildest confession of an opinion! Mr. Fendall merely said, and that in as few words as possible, that he had the good of the country and the interests of the poor at heart, and that in the event of his being elected to serve in Parliament, he intended, as far as lay in his power, to promote the prosperity and happiness of all classes of the community.

"Isn't that rather a scratchy kind of affair?" said Matthew to his brother, as they strolled together towards the Rectory. The written address was in Johnnie's hand, and he was about to submit it—previously to its publication—before the critical eyes of their joint friend, Mr. Santland.

"A *very* scratchy affair, *I* call it. Why, you've said nothing! Just look at old Tuckfield's. There are fifty electors at the very least who will vote for him from the conviction that they will have cheap bread, and beer at twopence a quart."

"And their wives will be as certain," added Johnnie, "that the tax will be taken off tea, as if they could go to-morrow to the village shop and purchase for a shilling the pound of clipped hedges and sloe-leaves for which Mrs. Mee has the audacity to ask them six."

"Well?" inquired the Colonel, who had expected an argument, and who was rather mystified by his brother's tone.

"Well, it only follows that the love of *bunkum* is as prevalent on this side the Atlantic as on the other, and that the taste is very nearly as pernicious."

"But you might have said *something*."

"I think I have said a great deal; but if Santland deem it advisable, I will add a note for the benefit of my readers, referring them to our duty to our neighbour, as it is enjoined us in the Golden Rule, which, you must allow, is as excellent a *résumé* of what we owe to one another as we happen to be acquainted with."

In the pretty Rectory drawing-room, they found Janetta Western and Bessie busy in election affairs; for the table was covered with yards upon yards of rustling scarlet ribbon, the edges of which were of blue (the colours of the Combe Hatton Hunt when the late Sir Matthew was Master of the Hounds), and the which ribbon had been ordered to be manufactured, by the extravagant elder son, expressly for the occasion. For Colonel Matthew had a very exalted idea of the Fendall greatness, and considered money well spent which had for its result the demonstrating of that greatness to the world at large. It never entered into his head as a probability that any one in his senses could seriously believe that there existed the being (were he the nominee of the Sovereign himself) who could have the remotest chance of carrying the county against a Fendall of Hazel Combe.

He looked forward to the 6th of the month immensely, as to a grand gala-day, in which multitudes (besides that, they would be jolly and vociferous) would have an opportunity of witnessing the popularity and high-standing of his family. It would be a famous time, too, for fun and flirtations, every phase of which Matthew was still boy enough to enjoy: but in the mean-

time—and as he never let slip any occasion which promised to afford him entertainment—Colonel Fendall heard with satisfaction that the Rector had walked out, but that the two young ladies were in the drawing-room.

“They are both *nice*,” Matthew had said more than once to his brother. Johnnie, by the way, had occasionally felt a *little* bored while listening to the dragoon’s untiring accounts of the ladies, young and middle-aged, dark and fair, maid, wife, and widow, who had at various periods fallen willing victims to his powers of fascination. “Yes, they are both awfully nice: but, do you know, I think on the whole I like the little filly best: she’s always jolly, while the long one takes one up sometimes, you know.”

Johnnie did not know. He thought that “taking up” and “putting down” meant, in some cases, pretty much the same thing. He bowed, however, to Matthew’s greater experience in such matters, and said he thought it very probable.

The Rectory drawing-room was, as I have said, a pretty and a bright-looking apartment; not large—parsonage “sitting-rooms” are seldom remarkable for space—but then it was so full of comfortable little sofas, covered with the gayest

and freshest of chintzes ; and the windows, like those of the breakfast-room, opened on such a garden !—honeysuckles peeping in at the windows ; while a perfume of roses, and the “ Frenchman’s darling,” the fragrant mignonette, came wandering through the pleasant shady room, wafted on the light summer breeze that gently lifted up from time to time the green venetian-blind : for the Rectory faced the south, and the summer sun was high up in the heavens.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A NEW MEMBER.

“THE more I read of his writing, the more I feel how much I should have admired him. I wish I had lived in his day ! I wish I had been as familiar with the composer and philosopher, as I think I am with his writings !”

It was Bessie Forester who spoke, and spoke, too, with blushing earnestness, for Johnnie Fendall was her colloquist ; and she was endeavouring, though for reasons far more excusable than those by which her friend Janetta was actuated, to render herself agreeable to her companion. The visit of the brothers was entirely unexpected : therefore it was by no pre-meditated act that that wonderful volume of Letters and of Essays lay open by her side, and that Bessie’s love for reading, which was not wholly frivolous, became known to her guardian’s former pupil.

"He was a great writer, and I should like to have known him."

They were almost alone : for Janetta and the Colonel had strayed into the verandah, whence a murmuring sound of voices, varied by an occasional girlish giggle, alone announced the near neighbourhood of a flirtation.

"I had once the same wish myself," said Fendall ; "for his writings give tokens of a mind accomplished, elegant, and instructed far beyond the average. I heard too, once, the most exquisite story of the delicacy and beauty of his intellect, and he lived (of that one feels convinced) in a romantic and delicious world of his own creation. I have one expression of his (which the world knows not) in my pocket-book, and I repeat it to myself the last thing every evening. It was another life to have written it. And yet——"

He paused. Perhaps he expected to be questioned concerning the one expression on which he set such store. Bessie, however, was diffident, and only responded to his concluding words, by repeating—

"And yet? Why are there always *yets* and *buts*? I hate them; they——"

"Are the moral to the fable which no one,

from the schoolboy upwards, ever reads," said Johnnie, smiling. "In this case the *yet* means that no men should be judged, either for good or evil, by their words or by their writings. By their works ye shall know men; and a good tree is known by its fruits."

"But surely," said Bessie, in alarm, "one who could write so beautifully of virtue could have done nothing really wrong? He was not a hypocrite—he could not have lived a wicked life."

"Far from it," said Fendall, again smiling at her eagerness; "nor was it, perhaps, altogether the philosopher's fault that the one pearl was wanting in the string of admirable qualities, and that the missing bead made all the rest run unevenly upon the line."

"And what was that missing pearl?"

"That which in common parlance is called the *heart*; for at home, and in his own family, he was morose, self-engrossed, and, I have even heard, tyrannical—a very wise but, truly, not a fond old man! No; believe me, dear Miss Forester"—(how she wished that he would call her Bessie!)"—“Believe me, that if the assertion be true, that the world knows nothing of its greatest men, it is equally a fact, that of those

whom it *does* know, it had better not know too much. Let us keep our illusions, in Heaven's name," he added gaily; "for who can tell what odious truths the realisation of our wishes might reveal to us! Shakspeare, for aught we know, may have written the Midsummer Night's Dream in a scratch-wig, and the author of the Book of Job may have habitually sworn at his wife for being too late for dinner."

"I suppose it never answers to look at anything through a magnifying-glass," said Bessie, in a low tone.

"On nothing that man has made," answered her companion, gravely.

"But God made man," she said, with a kind of awed timidity; for she had heard something of the unsoundness of Johnnie's religious opinions, and feared that she was standing on unholy ground.

"Yes! but not his vices—his evil passions, and his condensed and hardened selfishness! Miss Forester, I have an idea——"

But he was interrupted by feeling a hand laid rather heavily on his shoulder, and looking up he saw Santland standing close beside him.

"My dear Johnnie," said the Rector, the community of goods is all very well; but my

little Bessie has ideas enough already—such as they are—in her foolish head, and the sharing of yours would be rather a surplus of good things. So, Bessie child, off with you, and make the pudding, while we talk business, and discuss matters which you may consider yourself fortunate in not being able to understand.”

And so, in business conversations and in political discussions, the time wore away till the important 6th arrived, and the sun shone bright and cloudless on the great day of contest.

By nine o'clock the whole county-town was in full commotion. There were carriages loaded with voters, garnished with dark-blue ribbons, dashing up in rapid succession to the Blue Boar, the large hotel in the marketplace, where the General's committee was sitting; and as to the Red Lion, why, the scarlet flags, tipped with cerulean, which waved above the balconies were perfectly dazzling to the sight.

The ladies, perhaps, were amongst the most active of the canvassers; and they were almost to a woman, either openly or in secret, to be counted in the ranks of the younger candidate. Bessie Forester was very early in the field that morning, for she had tripped across the park before the dew was off the grass, to make her-

self useful at the Combe; and she had provided herself with such a bow, made of Johnnie's colours—an ornament which was destined, on her arrival, to be pinned neatly and carefully on the breast of Lady Fendall's handsome black silk dress.

"There will be a large field, my dear," said the old lady, looking at it admiringly, and evidently imagining the badge to be a portion of the scarlet hunting-suit which she had donned in the days of her pride. "There will be a large field, but the scent won't lie. I'm terribly afraid the scent won't lie."

And so she maundered on, with only Bessie to listen to the wanderings of her dotage; for all the rest—except the housemaids in their brilliant ribbons, and the dogs, whose collars were enlivened with the Fendall colours—were off to the election, a place of resort in which Mr. Santland had decreed that neither a clergyman nor his family had any business to show themselves.

The county-town was ten miles from Hazel Combe, so poor Bessie had to curb her impatience as best she could till nightfall, when the sound of carriage-wheels proclaimed the return of the absent ones.

They looked, she thought, annoyed and crest-fallen, as the lamplight fell upon their faces ; and Sir Matthew seemed very wearied—he was so little used to scenes of noise and bustle—as he approached his mother's chair, where she lay sleeping the deep and childlike slumber of extreme old age.

He never had admitted to any human being that the poor lady's intellects were not as clear as in the days when he was young ; and on the rare occasions when a momentary flash illuminated her mental powers, and caused her to speak in some sort rationally with her tongue, the excellent son would look around at the bystanders, with an air of triumph touching to behold.

It was a pleasant sight to see him touch her wrinkled forehead with his lips, and, after she had roused herself, tell his little budget of news (there was one every day for her), to which the ancient lady would listen with a kind of childish wonder, which Sir Matthew hoped was interest.

“ They were but three ahead, mother,” were his concluding words, after his short account of the polling was concluded—“ only three ahead, and no more coming up, when we drove away.”

"Stole away," mumbled the good lady, as her son offered her his arm (a nightly ceremony) to lead her to her sleeping-chamber. "Ay—that was a sure find, and Fendall was always in at the death;" and as she tottered away she continued to mutter indistinct reminiscences of her youthful days, while she patted her son's hand with her withered fingers.

Meanwhile, the opinions of Matthew and his brother were at variance as regarded the probable result of the next day's polling; for the former, in whose mind one impression was soon effaced by another, showed strong symptoms of despondency as regarded the final issue of the contest.

"It all depends upon this," he said, sententiously. "If, as some fellows say, old Tuckfield is keeping back his strength, like the postboys for a gallop up, so that he may come in with a rush, it's all over with us. And, hang it! I believe that is the case."

"Do you?" said Johnnie, rather languidly, for he was exhausted with the heat and excitement of the day. "You *may* be right, but I don't think so."

"How deuced cool you are about it! I don't believe you care whether you come in or not."

"Indeed I do, much more than I thought I

should; and besides, my father would be so greatly disappointed if anything went wrong. I had no conception that he would become so deeply interested in the result. Sufficient, however, for the day is the turmoil thereof. Let us to-bed now, with what appetite for sleep we may, and let us trust that to-morrow we may all be as contented with ourselves and our performances as dear old grannie has shown herself to be this night."

Another blazing summer sun shone on the beechwoods of Hazel Combe, and another long day of suspense and anxiety was endured by patient Bessie Forester in the morning-room of the restless old lady, whose incessant questionings, concerning events which occurred for the most part during the preceding century, would have been irritating in the extreme to one less thoroughly unselfish than the Rector's ward. But—as has been proved every day during the six thousand years (or the six millions, according to different computations) that the world has lasted—the longest day will have an end, and the most weary watcher's term of waiting will come to a close at last.

It was six o'clock, and Lady Fendall's maid had just arranged her mistress's evening-meal

of tea and toast—her dinner-hour was two—when a noise of carriage-wheels, accompanied by a sound of shouting voices, which every moment increased in volume, proclaimed to the excited girl, not only the return of the Hazel Combe party, but that Johnnie, “Long life to him!” (for that was the burthen of the cry which rent the air) was the victorious candidate, and that the county of —— was at last, according to the opinion of one humble but trusting heart, worthily and nobly represented.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A LAST INJUNCTION.

HAVING lingered so long over events which many of the present generation will probably consider "old world" in their character, I must dismiss with only a brief notice a few uneventful years which followed on the occurrences detailed in the preceding chapter.

After the election, everything went on very much as before at Hazel Combe, for the new Member had in earlier days so accustomed his family to his frequent absences, that he was not greatly missed by any one but the girl whose friendships were so limited, and the excitements in whose life had been so few in number.

Very small was her experience, and little had she known or read of lovers and their histories : she only felt that it was happiness when *he* was near, and dark and dull when she was left alone.

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THE GOLDEN RULE

*But sooth to say,—and I make the revelation
with infinite regret,—poor Bessie had but little
excuse for thus clinging to her much-loved idol;
nor can she in any way be justified for the tena-
city with which she twined her best affections
round the branch which seemed to her so
wondrously vigorous. For Johnnie, during all
the years that she had known him, had never
breathed a word to her of love, had never
pressed her hand with lingering fondness, nor
shown a wish, were it only for a passing moment,
for that sweet solitude à deux, in which the
music of two voices, and the light of one sweet
smile, can make of the most lonely place a gala
scene of happiness.*

But for all this, Bessie Forester, as the months and years sped by, was not a being to be pitied, for it was not much she needed to make her happy. The sight of Johnnie's name upon a printed page; a few "hear, hears!" following on an applauded speech which he had made in Parliament; the sight of his handwriting; and, above all, the frequent visits paid by him to Hazel Combe: such was the slender food on which her love was nourished, yet it sufficed her, for she had known no other.

Mr. Santland used to laugh at her for a pre-

judiced and prostrate hero worshipper, and to ask her, as the time went by, what had the little Member done, of whom she vaunted such great things. And Bessie then would smile and blush, and say the time must come when talents, such as Johnnie's, and aspirations born of such high and grand nobility of feeling, would be appreciated and rewarded.

But, it might be because Mr. Fendall's aspirations were too grand and noble, that he sat in the House "a hooded eagle among blinking owls" (this was Bessie Forester's view of the matter), and that no ostensible good to his country had followed upon his admission amongst that imposing body of legislators. He was incumbered also in his efforts by a superabundance of that dangerous quality called zeal, a circumstance which was as alarming to his friends, as it was re-assuring to his enemies. Nevertheless, and in spite of these manifest disadvantages, the Member for —— stood well out in public opinion from amidst the multitude of mediocrities; and even those who condemned his views as Utopian, visionary, and dangerous, listened attentively whilst he spoke, and admired the individual who possessed, not only the courage to utter opinions so unpopular, but

the talent to divest (for the moment at least) his favourite theories of the ridicule which was their due.

Meanwhile Colonel Fendall, at the expiration of his leave, returned to India, and, infinitely to that young lady's surprise and disgust, uncumbered with Miss Janetta Western.

It had long been clear to Matthew's many female friends and acquaintances, that that enterprising gentleman being essentially not "a marrying man," it would require—in order to lure him into the toils of matrimony—a far greater adept in her art than the pretty cousin whose zeal had been proved to be so far superior to her experience. But though long in making her appearance on the stage, the successful actress was announced at last, and the fate of the obdurate man was no longer doubtful. Many women wondered what the Colonel saw in the Anglo-Indian (Miss Vansittart was the daughter of a rich civilian) to induce him to lay—what we will call by courtesy—his *laurels* at her feet, for the lady was ten years poor Janetta's senior, and did not possess a tithe of the latter's personal merits. Perhaps, however, he did *not* admire her, even while he followed her to the altar, *les oreilles basses*, and an air

of patient resignation impressed on his manly features.

Janetta was already beginning to reckon up the years which must still elapse before her truant cousin might reasonably be expected to come home for *good*, when the fatal news came that he was married, and that another, and that other a woman ten years older than herself, had obtained the prize for which she had so long and so vainly laboured.

But, whilst announcing the surprising fact of Colonel Fendall's entrance into the bonds of matrimony, I am neglecting the proper order and arrangement of events; and must retrace my steps to Hazel Combe, in order to relate, in as few words as possible, the particulars of a domestic calamity which took place about six months previously to the last recorded occurrence.

This calamity—there were not many who gave that name to the event—was the death of Lady Fendall, at the age of three-score and thirty; very old indeed she was, and “full of honour,” although many a day had passed since the ancient retainers on the estate had heard the sound of Milady's voice, asking kindly concerning their wants, and prescribing for their maladies. It

was pleasant, nevertheless, to the old people to know that their friend and benefactress was alive, and well in health ; nor did a single day go by without the inquiry of " How is Milady ? " being made again and again of Sir Matthew, as he went his rounds amongst those by whom he was so much and so deservedly beloved.

The winter came, one of those winters of which it is the custom to say, that they are very trying to old people, and a slight cough, despite the unremitting care which was taken of that child-like relic of a by-gone century, shook Lady Fendall's frail and attenuated frame, even as the withered grain-stalk is swayed by the lightest breath of wind that blows upon it.

Sir Matthew took the alarm at once, and sent without delay, first for medical advice, and then for Bessie Forester, whose ministering in a sick room was known to be invaluable, and whose voice and touch were often recognised by the venerable lady, even when she failed to notice the presence of the son she loved.

The physician came at the call of the deeply anxious man, and pronounced the melancholy fact, that his skill was useless, for that the closing hour was at hand, and that Lady Fendall

—the charitable and the good—was entering into her rest.

Not many days did she linger amongst them ; yet very gradually did the lamp of life die out at last. They watched her through two weary silent nights, and as the last drew near its close, the flame flashed brightly up, and for a passing moment Lady Fendall knew them all once more.

“ My son,” she murmured, and then feebly pressing with her wrinkled hand the one that held her own, she said, “ Matthew—let them marry—those good children—Bessie—Johnnie—I shall see you all again in Heaven ! ”

They were her only words, and after them she remained quite still, so still, that Bessie, when she laid her cheek upon the aged breast, could feel no beating there.

The Rector came very early on that morning, for he was strangely curious to be present at the closing scene of a life, in which that mighty mystery called the soul had for years past borne so small a part.

But early as was the hour when his gentle rap was heard upon the outer door, he came too late, for already, although the watchers beside that aged pilgrim knew it not, she had gone to

her everlasting rest ; whilst with those who stood so mute and tearful by her bed, the hours had passed unheeded by, and even time appeared to sleep—

“ As he sleeps upon the silent face,
Of a dark dial in a sunless place,”

CHAPTER XXX.

MATTHEW MAKES AN ANNOUNCEMENT.

SIX months had hardly elapsed since the death of Lady Fendall, when preparations, to the surprise of many, were actively commenced for the marriage of Johnnie with the Rector's ward. Sir Matthew had felt his mother's loss severely: he was a man of few words, and no one—Bessie, perhaps, excepted—knew how much, and for how long a time, he suffered. She was much at the Combe during the first period of her old friend's bereavement; for almost immediately after the funeral, the meeting of Parliament called the zealous Johnnie to London, where, with the exception of occasional visits to his father, he remained for several months.

The first event which roused Sir Matthew from the state of depression into which he had fallen, was the receipt of a letter from TaCuatl containing the announcement—to which I have before alluded—of Colonel Fendall's marriage.

He walked down to the Rectory with the characteristic epistle in his hand. It was not often that Matthew troubled himself to write. Letters were out of his line, he used to say ; which was true enough, for caligraphy was clearly not amongst the accomplishments of that stalwart colonel of dragoons, whilst there were certain words (but this was a secret only confided to his most intimate friends) which went far to prove the melancholy fact, that Matthew, after his twenty years of military service, was even

“ Farther off from *spelling* than when he was a boy.”

“ My dear Governor,” he wrote, “ I daresay you will think that I am going to make a fool of myself, when I tell you that I am going to be married. I should have liked to hear your opinion of Miss Vansittart, who is a very fine woman, and very fond of me ; but as I can’t, it can’t be helped. She hasn’t any money down, but that is nothing ; and I am sure you will like her : her father is a judge, and spends lots of money. I shall try and come home for good soon, as I am getting confoundedly seedy with the climate, and the doctors say the liver is allways wrong.”

This was the substance of the missive, which Sir Matthew read aloud (he did not—for reasons which the reader will appreciate—submit it to the Rector's inspection); and when he had concluded, he said—

“This is great news, indeed! Matthew a married man! And coming home. So much that is pleasant all at once! And of course she has made no difficulty about that poor boy. A sensible woman, and a good Christian, I have no doubt.”

Mr. Santland did not think that the premises exactly justified the conclusion arrived at by the sanguine Sir Matthew; nor could he rate quite so highly the disinterestedness of the “fine woman” who had graciously condescended to accept the heir to a baronetcy and eight thousand a year; albeit the property was incumbered by a son, now nearly sixteen years of age, and already in possession of a commission in one of Her Majesty's regiments of foot.

To confess the truth, also, the Rector's gratification at the news which his old friend had communicated to him was not entirely unmixed with regret; for, far from the world's pleasures and excitements as he long had lived, Santland had dreamed a pleasant dream for Bessie, whom

he had elected, in his fancy, as the future lady of the Combe, enjoying as her own the beauties of the place which had been the scene of her youth's happiness, and seeing her children's children disporting beneath the grand old beech trees which *he* had loved so well.

And all this agreeable vision had been dispelled in a moment by the advent of a few words from the distant Indian empire; and Mr. Santland, as his ears drank in the unwelcome intelligence contained in Matthew's letter, could have found it in his heart to wish that the "fine woman" by whom the Colonel's truant fancy had been at length enslaved, had never seen the light.

"I never for a moment regretted the line I took about little Myles," Sir Matthew went on to say; "and now I feel more than ever sure that I was right."

"Right," thought the Rector, "in the opinion of the few good men whose wisdom in the world's sight is foolishness."

"And I think the result has proved," continued Sir Matthew, "that I have made no mistake (as you so often warned me it would prove) in bringing up the boy, as I resolved to do, with a full knowledge of his birth, and consequently

of his position. Myles is a good lad, and shows no symptoms, as you feared would be the case, of a disposition embittered by a morbid consciousness of imagined inferiority."

The tone of the remark being interrogative, was replied to by a suggestion from Santland, to the effect that mental injuries might produce hidden diseases infinitely more dangerous, inasmuch as they were occult, and might spread their venomous fangs long before any attempt at combating the evil could be made.

"I should be deeply grieved," rejoined Sir Matthew, "to think that my grandson was likely to suffer from any such mysterious cause; but, even with that fear before my eyes, I should act in the same manner were a misfortune of a similar character—which I am happy to say is in the last degree improbable—to occur again in my family. My son could not do what honour and justice demanded of him" (Santland abstained from expressing his belief that "would not" might have been the more appropriate phrase), "and, therefore, it behoved him to make that amends to the child which death had forbade that he should offer to the mother."

"If I remember aright," said Santland, "we never differed in that respect; my advice only

went the length that you should, whilst bestowing every care on the boy's education, keep him in the dark as to what the world calls the faults of his parents. Why should he have been told that the mother who bore him is a woman who is stigmatised as 'fallen?' A fallen woman! There is a shield in the code of honour thrown over a man who has been conquered and laid low, and by it we are forbidden to insult a fallen foe; but for a helpless woman, lying lowly on the ground, there is no protection, excepting in the neglected word of Him who said that by the guiltless only should a woman be condemned!"

"But I did not condemn her," murmured poor Sir Matthew; "God knows how much I pitied her, and that I would have done all I could to serve both her and hers!"

"And yet you have betrayed her to her son, and—but I will not dwell upon this question,—only, Sir Matthew, it was an unwise act, believe me, and one which, were not you its perpetrator, I should call a cruel one—to reveal to that poor lad his mother's shame, and bid him know himself a nameless child."

"I did it for the best: I wished to show to him and to the world, that the unhappy girl was

sinned against, not sinning : and that, had she lived, she would have been Matthew's wife. But I had another reason likewise, although it is one which, probably, you will think showed too much harshness toward Matthew."

The Rector could scarcely suppress a smile at the idea of Sir Matthew's severity, but he nevertheless looked his curiosity, and his companion continued.

"I thought that he should bear in some sort the burthen of his sin ; for why should men escape, and only women suffer ? Why should men hold their heads erect after such cruel deeds, while their poor victims either sink into an early grave, or walk the earth dishonoured and forlorn ? "

Mr. Santland did not attempt to enlighten Sir Matthew's inexperienced mind in regard to the fallacies he had been uttering : for it would have been lost labour to endeavour to prove to him that Matthew, with his "prospects," must do infinitely worse than display to the world an evidence of his early "wildness," before that world would punish him by its coldness for the errors of his youth. Clearly, too, there was no good to be gained by reverting to a mistake, if mistake it were, which had been committed some ten years

previously, and could never now be rectified ; so, taking these circumstances into consideration, the Rector said, in a lighter tone,

“ My dear Sir Matthew, I have often said—and I only wish that I could act upon the resolution,—that there are two classes of subjects on which I will never argue, namely, those which *are* susceptible of proof, and those which are not. Now it appears to me that the one we have been discussing comes under the latter head, so what think you of joining that contented looking pair under the Beeches, and of imparting to Miss Bessie the news that your cousin, Miss Janetta’s, envy of her prospects will be lessened by one half, for that the country parson’s ward will never be what old Dame Hickson calls ‘ a Baronet’s lady ? ’ ”

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN APPARITION AT HAZEL COMBE.

THERE was one circumstance connected with the engagement of Bessie Forester which would (had she been aware of its existence), have gone far towards preventing the marriage on which Sir Matthew had set his heart, it being a melancholy fact that Johnnie's proposals had been prompted, not by the strong impulse of a lover-like passion, but by a desire to gratify his father, and a latent wish to obey his grandmother's dying injunctions.

Some time, however, had elapsed (so entirely was he absorbed by the memory of his great sorrow) before Sir Matthew remembered, that in fulfilling the expectations of his expiring parent, he had still a pleasant as well as a sacred duty to perform; the recollection, however, came about at last after this wise.

The sight of Bessie Forester at the Combe had grown to be a thing of such normal and every-

day occurrence, that its owner was hardly aware how greatly her presence contributed to the comfort and the cheerfulness of his home. But when, after the funeral, the days and even the weeks passed away, and no visitor from the rectory, save, on one occasion, Mr. Santland, in his black gloves and crape, arrived to break through the monotony of the lagging hours, then the bereaved man began to ask himself the reason of the change which had occurred.

It was a cold and windy evening in March, and Sir Matthew and his son were sitting quite silently, as was their custom, in their respective easy-chairs beside the hearth, when a deep sigh broke from the lips of the older man.

"My dear father," exclaimed Johnnie, starting at the sound, "how forgetful I have been! You are waiting for your game at chess, and I was deep in mental cogitations about slavery!"

"You make yourself a slave to me, my dear," said Sir Matthew affectionately, as his son rose to make preparations for his father's entertainment.

"A very willing one," returned Johnnie, cheerfully; although, sooth to say, the nightly recurrence of an "entertainment" in which he took no interest, would have proved very weary-

ing, save for the knowledge that it passed away more pleasantly one of his father's trying evening hours.

The room was large, and very imperfectly lighted by the lamp which stood on the table near Sir Matthew's chair, and which threw its gleams upon the head now more than slightly bald that bent above the game.

"How grandly the wind is making its wild music through the woods," said Johnnie, pausing to listen while he held a "knight" between his fingers. "I love to hear it. It reminds me of my early childhood, when Mat and I were little fellows, father, before we went to school. And don't you remember, sir," he went on to say, as, warming up with his recollections of the past he leant back in his chair, and forgot for the moment that there were such things before him as bishops, queens, and castles:—"Don't you remember the day when the kite got fast in the large oak tree near the water meadow, and Mat mounted upon your shoulders to climb up and let it loose? And then the boat, that stormy day—the wind was just like this,—when—"

And he was going on, when, his eyes resting on his father's, he thought he saw a gathering moisture in them: and stopping suddenly, he

moved his piece, grieving to think that he had drawn aside the veil which screened the memory of the past.

They continued their game almost in silence till ten o'clock had struck, while still the wind howled (as Sir Matthew thought, with dreary moanings) through the leafless branches, beating in sudden gusts against the window-panes, and mingling with the melancholy hooting of an ancestral owl, whose family dwelling-place had been, from time immemorial, in the hollow branch of the great elm which stood beside the lofty portico of the Combe.

"A dismal night upon the sea," the old man said,—for he *was* an old man now: his mother's death and the breaking up of his familiar habits had told so heavily upon him. "A dismal time upon the sea! There will be many wrecks to-night, I fear." And as he spoke he rose, and drew aside the window curtain.

The night was dark as pitch, so dark that he could see nothing beyond the panes of glass in front of him.

"God help the wives and mothers who have those they love at sea in such a storm as this!"

"Amen!" said Johnnie, who had joined him, and who was making his hand a shade from

the light, whilst he peered out into the darkness.

He had not looked a moment, when he saw outside the glass, close by, and staring fixedly into his, two human eyes ! They were so near, that, but for the intervening pane, he could almost have touched them with his face, yet they remained quite motionless, seeming as though they saw him not.

For a moment Johnnie stood as mute as if he had been fascinated by the sight before him, and then, throwing open the sash, he sprang out upon the lawn.

The time employed in opening the window had been but short, yet, instantaneous almost as had been its duration, it had apparently sufficed for the escape of the stranger, since Johnnie looked in vain around him in the darkness, nor could his ear detect a sound which might reveal to him the presence of the nocturnal visitor.

During a quarter of an hour, at the very least, he sought diligently amongst the surrounding evergreens, and behind the trunks of the spreading trees, for the intruder on their privacy ; and it was with infinite reluctance that he at last found himself obliged to admit to himself that any further search was useless, although he was

as far as ever from confessing that his own organs of vision had deceived him, and caused him to see an object which had no existence except in a disordered imagination.

But certain as he felt on this point, he at once made up his mind that he would not impart to Sir Matthew his conviction that they had been the objects of that mysterious and disagreeable scrutiny; for his father, as he was well aware, was likely to dwell upon the occurrence nervously, and might also, very probably, be induced (from a suspicion that some person in distress might be seeking for a refuge) to sally forth himself upon a journey of discovery.

"It was nothing but an absurd fancy of mine," said he, in answer to Sir Matthew's somewhat agitated inquiries. "I imagined I saw some one standing outside the window, but it was all a mistake. There could be no one, for I did not hear the bark of a single dog, and old Bruin is always on the alert, to say nothing of Chip and Block."

"The wind might have drowned the sound of their voices," suggested his father, and then he added, as if a sudden thought had struck him, "this was the time when that dear girl Bessie used to sing to us. Do you recol-

lect, Johnnie, the song your dear grandmother loved so much to hear? She sung it the last night—you were not here then—as she sat on a low stool by my poor mother's feet, and it seems almost as if I heard it now: 'Entreat me not to leave thee,' she sung, 'or to return from following after thee; for where thou goest I will go, and where thou diest there will I be buried.' She loved your grandmother very dearly, Johnnie, and—but we will talk of that to-morrow. Good night now, my dear, and do not go into the cold night air again. I think you must have fancied that you saw a person there, but we will make inquiries to-morrow, and ascertain if any suffering creature has been seen about the house this evening."

Johnnie was relieved to find that his father did not take the matter seriously to heart; but, far from obeying his injunctions, he spent another half-hour (before he retired to bed) in a search, which proved as fruitless as the first, after the wanderer, whose nocturnal visit had so greatly startled and disturbed him.

END OF VOL.

